0240410

PS 3511 464 P4 P69

PEAK AND PRAIRIE

FULLER ANNA

DATE DUE

GAYLORD			PRINTED IN U.S.A.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/peakprairiefromc0000full

Peak and Prairie

"SHE SAT GAZING AT THE VIEW HE LOVED."

Peak and Prairie

FROM A COLORADO
SKETCH-BOOK

CENTRAL MISSOURI
STATE COLLEGE
Warrensburg

BY

Anna Fuller

Short Story Index Reprint Series

BOOKS FOR LIBRARIES PRESS
FREEPORT, NEW YORK

First Published 1894
Reprinted 1969

TO ONE
TO WHOM I OWE
COLORADO
AND MUCH BESIDES
THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED

STANDARD BOOK NUMBER:
8369-3103-3

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER:
75-94724

MANUFACTURED BY
HALLMARK LITHOGRAPHERS, INC.
IN THE U.S.A.

PS
3511
U64
P4
1969

PREFACE.

THE sketches of Colorado life which make up this volume are little more than hints and suggestions caught from time to time by a single observer in a comparatively narrow field of observation. Narrow as the field is, however, it offers a somewhat unusual diversity of scene; for that most charming of health resorts known in these pages as Springtown, is the chance centre of many varying interests. In its immediate vicinity exists the life of the prairie ranch on the one hand and that of the mining-camp on the other; while dominating all as it were—town, prairie, and mountain fastness—rises the great Peak which has now for so many years been the goal of pilgrimage to men and women from the Eastern States in pursuit of health, of fortune, or of the free, open-air life of the prairie. If, from acquaintance with these fictitious characters set in a very real environment, the reader be led to form

240410

some slight impression of the stirring little drama which is going forward to-day in that pleasant Land of Promise, he will have incidentally endorsed the claim of these disconnected sketches to be regarded as a single picture.

MAY, 1894.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
PREFACE		vii
I.	A PILGRIM IN THE FAR WEST	1
II.	BRIAN BORU	36
III.	JAKE STANWOOD'S GAL	60
IV.	AT THE KEITH RANCH.	101
V.	THE RUMPETY CASE	123
VI.	THE LAME GULCH PROFESSOR	151
VII.	THE BOSS OF THE WHEEL	187
VIII.	MR. FETHERBEE'S ADVENTURE	217
IX.	AN AMATEUR GAMBLE	240
X.	A ROCKY MOUNTAIN SHIPWRECK	266
XI.	A STROKE IN THE GAME	301
XII.	THE BLIZZARD PICNIC	335
XIII.	A GOLDEN VISTA	369

NOTE. – Of the thirteen sketches included in this volume six have previously appeared in periodicals, as follows:

A Pilgrim in the Far West in *Harper's Weekly; Brian Boru* in *Worthington's Magazine; Jake Stanwood's Gal* and *At the Keith Ranch* in *The Century Magazine; The Rumpety Case* in *Lippincott's Magazine;* and *An Amateur Gamble* in *Scribner's Magazine.* They were, however, all prepared with reference to their final use as a consecutive series. A. F.

PEAK AND PRAIRIE.

I.

A PILGRIM IN THE FAR WEST.

THE Peak was superb that morning, big and strong, and glittering with snow. Little Mrs. Nancy Tarbell turned, after shutting and locking the door of her cottage, and looked down the street, at the end of which the friendly giant stood out against a clear blue sky. The cotton-wood trees on either side of the road were just coming into leaf, and their extended branches framed in her mighty neighbor in a most becoming manner. The water in the irrigating ditch beneath the trees was running merrily. The sound of it brought a wistful look into the cheerful old face. It made Mrs. Nancy think of the gay little brook in the pasture behind the house at home—at home, in far New England.

Surely it must have been a strange wind of destiny that wafted this unadventurous little woman across half a continent to the very foot of the Rocky Mountains—a long and weary journey for the young and vigorous. Yet it was something no stranger than a mother's love for her only child. For "Willie's" sake the widow Tarbell had turned her back upon the dear New England woods and meadows, upon the tidy village where every man and woman was her friend; for his sake she had come to dwell among strangers in a strange and barren land. The old homestead had been sold, and with the meagre proceeds she had paid their way across the prairies, and had bought a little house and a lot of land on the outskirts of Springtown, while Willie looked about him for something to do. But the enemy before whom they had fled followed them to the high pure altitude it loves not, and before poor Willie had found anything to do, he had been "called up higher." This was the phrase the minister used at Willie's funeral, and it had been peculiarly comforting to the bereaved mother. She had known well that her boy needed higher air, for that she had come to live six thousand feet above the level of the New England pastures. But the Lord saw that

she, with her poor human wisdom, could not lead him to the needed height, and He had called him up higher yet, where are blessing and healing forever. With this abiding consolation in her heart, Willie's mother could face the shining Peak day after day and month after month with a countenance as brave and cheerful as his own. It was only when she listened to the sound of running waters, or some other voice of the past, that the wistful look came into her face.

Meanwhile it was good life-giving air that she breathed, and good warm sunshine that rested upon her, as she stepped briskly on her way. Her little cottage was no longer on the outskirts of the town. Stately mansions had risen up about her, and a long procession of houses now stretched far up to the northward. The people idly looking forth from the windows of the stately mansions, did not realize how much a part of the landscape the little black figure had become, passing and repassing their doors. A small meek figure it was, with little indication of the bright spirit within. It was her "best dress" of ten years ago that she now "wore common." The folds of the skirt, cut in the fashion of a by-gone day, offered ample accommodation for bustle and steels,

and in the absence of these props the gown had a collapsed, inconsequent air. But little Mrs. Nancy had never seen her own back, and she wore the gown with a pleased consciousness of being well dressed. Then there was the thin cashmere shoulder cape, with the long slimpsy fringe, which Willie, in his pride and fondness, had persuaded her to buy, and which had a curiously jaunty and inapt appearance on the narrow shoulders. The close black felt bonnet was rusty and of antiquated shape. And since few ever thought of looking within these prosaic externals to note the delicacy of the soft old cheek, and the sweet innocence of the faded blue eyes beneath the thin gray locks, it is perhaps no wonder that the dwellers in the stately mansions quite overlooked their modest little neighbor.

Mrs. Nancy was expecting to bring back her marketing in the flat twine bag she carried, and she was also thinking of calling at the milliner's and inquiring the cost of having her old black straw bonnet pressed over and retrimmed. She held her purse tightly between her fingers, encased in loose black cotton gloves, as she tried to estimate the sum of such an unwonted outlay. Her means were very, very slender, yet she could not bear that Willie's mother should look too shabby.

And was that all? Who knows but that the spring instinct of renewal and rejuvenation played a part in her resolve quite independent of the perennial thought of Willie? The drama of life does not cease even in the most unobtrusive consciousness. It was going on in little Mrs. Nancy's brain at every step of her morning walk. As the shriek of a locomotive rent the air, a bright smile suddenly crossed her face. Her thoughts had taken a different and more inspiring turn.

"Who knows," she said to herself. "Maybe that is the very engine that will take me home some day—when Atchison begins to pay again."

The noisy engines had always a reassuring sound to her ears. She would sometimes lie in bed listening with rapture to their discordant cries. They were the willing servants that would one day carry her eastward, miles upon miles, hours upon hours—eastward to the old home, within smell of the salt air, where there were familiar faces to welcome her, familiar voices to speak of Willie.

The people here, the few she knew, were very kind, but they seemed to have forgotten Willie, and she was shy of speaking of him. But all the home folks would flock to meet her, and to hear of his last brave hours. How

glad they would be to know that he had lacked nothing! Atchison had given them all they needed while Willie was alive. She blessed Heaven for that.

She had arrived in the business part of the town, where wagons and foot-passengers thronged at this hour of the morning. She willingly let them divert her thoughts. She liked the bustle and hurry of the scene. The well-dressed men and women in their trim turn-outs little guessed what pleasure their high-stepping horses and silver-mounted harnesses gave to the modest little woman threading her way among the people on the sidewalk.

Suddenly Mrs. Nancy's pleased survey of the scene was interrupted. Glancing down a side street she beheld a sight which made her heart beat hard. A big, rough-looking man was striding along the sidewalk, dragging at the end of a long pole a frightened white dog. The dog was pulling back with might and main, scarcely using its unwilling legs in its enforced progress over the ground. What could it mean? Was the dog mad? He looked harmless enough. They were only a few rods off, and Mrs. Nancy soon overtook them. The dog proved to be a small white

collie, and as she came up with him he gave her an appealing look out of his great brown eyes, which filled her with compassion and indignation.

"What are you doing with that dog?" she demanded, in a peremptory tone of voice quite out of keeping with the rusty black bonnet.

"Doin'?" repeated the man, somewhat surprised. "I 'm takin' him to the City Hall."

"What for?"

"He ain't got no license on."

"And what are you going to do with him when you get him there?"

"*I* ain't goin' to do nothin' more with him."

"Will they put a license on him?"

"Not much! He won't need no license after to-morrow morning." The man's grin seemed perfectly diabolical.

"You don't mean they 'll kill him?"

"I reckon that 's about the size of it."

"But suppose the owner would rather pay the license?" she urged.

"Then he 'd better step round lively and pay it. There ain't no time to lose. The law was on the 1st of May, and the owner 'd ought to have attended to it before now."

The unutterable tragedy of the situation was heightened by the needless humiliation and terror of the victim, and once again Mrs. Nancy protested.

"What makes you drag him at the end of that pole?"

"I ain't goin' to give him a chance at my breeches, not if I knows myself," replied the man, defiantly.

"He would n't hurt your pantaloons. See how gentle he is!" and the little woman pulled off her glove to pat the pretty white head. As the grateful creature licked her hand she felt a thrill of new pity and tenderness. By this time they were at the City Hall. "What do you have to pay for a license?" she asked.

"Two good solid dollars," said the man. "I never seen a dog yet that was worth that money, did you?" And dog and persecutor disappeared together within a sinister-looking basement door.

Mrs. Nancy Tarbell stood for a moment irresolute, and then she slowly wended her way along the sidewalk, pondering the thing she had seen. Two dollars! That was a large sum of money in these hard times. Could she possibly spare it? She did not know yet what her tax bill would be, but for some unexplained

reason it turned out to be larger every year. She supposed it was owing to the improvements they were making in the town, and she had too much self-respect to protest. But it was really getting to be a serious matter.

In her perplexity and absorption the little lady had turned eastward, and presently she found herself close upon a railroad track over which a freight train was slowly passing. It was the Atchison road, and she watched with interest the long, slow train.

"They appear to be doing a good business," she said to herself. "Seems as though they might make out to pay something or other."

When the train had passed she stepped across the track, looking with interest at the well-laid rails and the solid ties. "Queer, is n't it?" she thought. "Now I own six thousand dollars worth of that track, and yet I can't squeeze out of it enough to pay a poor little dog's license."

She never could think without a feeling of awe of the magnitude of the sum left her by her thrifty husband, the bulk of which sum was represented by those unfruitful certificates. She stooped and felt the rails, looking cautiously up and down the road to be sure

no train was coming. After all, it was consoling to think that that good honest steel and timber was partly her property. It was not her first visit to the spot.

"Queer, is n't it," she reflected, as she had often done before, "that there is n't any way that I can think of to make my own road take me home? Anyhow I 'll buy that license *just to spite 'em*," she exclaimed, with sudden decision; and shaking the dust of Atchison from her feet, and the far more bewildering dust of financial perplexities from her mind, she walked quickly back to the town.

It took a certain amount of resolution to turn the handle of the sinister-looking door, and the group of men lounging in the smoking-room, and turning upon her inquisitive glances as she entered, might even then have daunted her, had not her eye fallen upon a dejected bunch of whitish hair in one corner.

As she stepped into the room, a white tail disengaged itself from the round hairy bundle, and began pathetically to beat the floor, while two very beautiful and beseeching eyes were fixed upon her face. Had she still been irresolute this mute appeal would have been irresistible, and suddenly feeling as bold as a lion she stepped up to the desk where the city

marshal was throned, and demanded a license for the white dog. The two great silver dollars which she drew from her purse looked very large to the widow Tarbell, yet it was with a feeling of exultation that she paid them as ransom for the white dog. In return for the money she received a small, round piece of metal with a hole bored through it, bearing a certain mystic legend which was to act as a talisman to the wearer. Her name and address were duly entered on the books. Then her agitated little beneficiary was untied from the chair leg, the rope which bound him was put into her hands, and with a polite courtesy Mrs. Tarbell turned to go.

By a sudden impulse one of the rough-looking men got up from his chair, and, taking his hat off, opened the door. A light flush crossed the little woman's cheek as she accepted the attention, and then the two small figures, the black and the white, passed out into the delicious Colorado sunshine.

"She looked 'most too small to handle that big door," said the tall fellow, apologetically, as he re-established his wide sombrero on the back of his head, and, resuming his seat, tilted his chair once more against the wall. The other men smoked on in silence. No one felt

inclined to chaff this shamefaced Bayard. Mrs. Tarbell, meanwhile, led her willing captive along, delighting in his cheerful aspect and expressive tail. He was dirty, to be sure, and he was presumably hungry. Who could tell what hardships he had suffered before falling into the brutal hands of the law? She stopped to buy her dinner, to which she added five cents' worth of dog's-meat, but the milliner's door was passed coldly by. The old straw would have to serve her another season.

Before they had gone two blocks, Mrs. Nancy had named the collie David. She had no question whatever about the name, for had he not been delivered out of the hands of the Philistines? She was patient with him when he paused to make the acquaintance of other dogs, and even once when he succeeded in winding the cord tightly about her ankles. Nevertheless it was a relief to get him home, and to tie him to the post of her front porch, where he established himself with entire willingness, and promptly dropping asleep, forgot alike his perils and his great escape.

The first care of his new friend on arriving home was to secure the license upon him. He was collarless, and she was a good deal "put to it" to supply the lack. At last she

resolved to sacrifice her shawl-strap in the emergency. She might miss it, to be sure, when she came to go home, but then, she reflected, if she were once on her way home, she would not care about any little inconvenience. So as soon as she and David had had a good dinner, she got down the old strap, which had hung on a certain nail for five long years, and taking a kitchen knife, ruthlessly chopped it off to the right length. Then she bored a new hole with her scissors for the tongue of the buckle to pass through, and, going to Willie's tool box, found a short piece of wire with which—it seemed but the other day—he had been tinkering something about the house. With the wire she fastened the license securely to the collar. But before David could be found worthy of such decoration, he was subjected to a pretty severe bath in an old tub out in the back yard.

Poor David! This was a novel and painful dispensation, and he submitted only under protest. But his new mistress was firm, and, arrayed in her oldest calico gown, with spectacles on her nose, she applied herself, with the energy and determination of all her New England grandmothers, to the task of scrubbing and soaping and squeezing and combing the

dirt out of the long, thick hair. Three tubs of water were barely sufficient for the process, but finally David emerged, subdued but clean, looking very limp and draggled, and so much smaller because of his wet, close-clinging coat, that for a moment Mrs. Nancy thought, with a pang, that she might have washed away a part of the original dog. Later, however, when the sun had dried the fluffy hair, and when she fastened the new collar about the neck of the spotless animal, she let him lick her very face, so delighted were they both with the result of her labors. The rest of the afternoon they passed amicably together on the sunny porch. She would look up occasionally from her sewing, and say, "Good doggy!" and David would immediately wag his tail in delighted response. He was extremely mannerly and appreciative of the slightest attention—always excepting his enforced ablutions—and he seemed to approve of the kind eyes of his little protectress as warmly as she approved of his cool leather nose and speaking ears. As often as he moved, his license, hitting against the collar buckle, made a safe, cheerful sound, and Mrs. Nancy felt quite overcome with joy and gratitude at having been the chosen instrument of his preservation. When she lighted the

lamp in the evening and began her regular game of backgammon, David curled himself up at her feet in a most companionable manner, and pricked his ears with interest at the fall of the dice.

But for her backgammon it would be difficult to imagine what Mrs. Tarbell would have done with her evenings, for her eyes were not strong enough for reading or sewing. She had got the habit of playing backgammon with Willie, after he became too weak for more active occupations, and they had kept the score in a little green blank-book. After he died she had missed the game, and she had found it pleasant to take it up again, and to play for both herself and Willie. The score, too, had been continued in the old book. At the top of each new page she wrote in her precise old-fashioned hand, "Mother," "Willie," and under her name all the victories of the "whites" were scored, while those of the "blacks" were still recorded to Willie's credit. After a while her eyesight began to fail still more, and it become necessary to lift the dice and examine them "near to." Then gradually she found that the black checkers occasionally eluded her, and that she was straining her eyes in her efforts to see them in the shadowy corners of

the board. When at last she found that by an oversight she had committed a flagrant injustice to Willie's interests, she felt that something must be done. Being fertile in resource, she presently bethought herself of the bright colored wafers she had played with in her childhood, and to her joy she found they were still to be bought. Having possessed herself of a box of them, she proceeded to stick a glittering gilt star upon each side of each checker, both black and white, after which the checkerboard took on a showy theatrical appearance.

Mrs. Nancy rarely felt lonely when playing backgammon. The click of the dice sounded cheerful and sociable ; the checkers, with their shining eyes, seemed to take a real interest in the game ; and when she scored the result to "Willie" or to "Mother," the old familiar every-day relation seemed restored between them.

To-night Willie was having all the luck, and that was sure to put his mother in the best of spirits. She played on and on, much later than her custom was, till at last the luck turned, and looking at her flat, gold-faced watch, she found, with a shock, that it was ten minutes after ten o'clock.

"My sakes!" she cried. "I ought to be

ashamed of myself! Come, David, come right along to bed. You 're going to sleep on the mat at the back door."

David, who was nothing if not amenable, cheerfully acceded to this arrangement. Even before his new mistress had finished tying him to the railing, he had curled himself up on the mat and was fast asleep. When she patted him on the head, however, by way of good-night, his tail gave a responsive wag, and little Mrs. Nancy left him with the friendliest feelings.

The next morning the dog was gone. Yes, incredible as it seems, that graceless dog was gone—gone without a word of farewell.

Mrs. Nancy was standing gazing in dejected mood at the fragment of string he had left behind him, when the milkman, one of her special cronies, arrived. The good-natured Sam was full of sympathy.

"I reckon he came in with some ranchman yesterday, and got lost in the town. Like as not he 's gone home. Good Lord! I 'd just like to see that 'ere ranchman when his dog gits back with a locket round his neck!"

"I washed him too, Sam," Mrs. Nancy lamented, as she accompanied her visitor to the gate. She was too conscientious to detain the man from the performance of his duty.

"You washed him!" he cried, as he got into his cart. "Jerusalem! I guess that 's the first time a ranch dog ever got a taste of a bath."

And the cart rattled off, leaving David's little friend standing at the gate. It was just after sunrise, and she looked down the street to the mountains, which were bathed in a flood of translucent crimson reflected from the east.

"I wonder if the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem look very different from that!" she mused, as she gazed into the deepening color. When she turned back to the house, she had almost forgotten the ungrateful runaway in thoughts of her boy and his heavenly abiding place.

The next afternoon Mrs. Tarbell was sitting on her front porch endeavoring to readjust the bows upon the old straw bonnet. She had taken them off, and sponged both ribbon and straw, and she was now trying her best to make the bows hold up their heads with the spirit and grace which distinguish a milliner's trimming. She looked up from time to time to enjoy the reflection of the trees in the lake surrounding the house. For her grass was being flooded to-day, and that was always a

pretty sight. "It looks almost as pretty as Watkins' pond out on the Goodham turnpike," she reflected, as the water glistened in a broad expanse. She owned a good piece of land, a hundred feet front. Willie had meant to have a vegetable garden when he had got strong enough to work in it.

A horseman had turned into the street, and came cantering toward the house. But horsemen were part of the landscape in Colorado, and she scarcely noticed his approach till a joyful bark caused her to look up, just in time to see David take a flying leap over the gate and come dashing up to her.

"Why, David!" she cried; and then she stopped, abashed, for the horseman was already tying his pony to the post.

"Mrs. Tarbell?" he questioned, as he opened the gate; and without waiting for an answer, he went on: "I've come to thank you for getting my dog away from those scoundrels at the City Hall. They had the decency to tell me where to look for you."

"Oh, pray don't mention it!" said little Mrs. Nancy, with old-fashioned courtesy.

"Not mention it!" cried her visitor. "It was the kindest thing I ever heard of. I don't see what made you do it."

"Oh, I could n't help it. David looked so miserable being dragged along at the end of a pole."

"The cowards!" he cried. "Don't get a chair, ma'am. I like the steps better. Did you call him David?" he asked, with a twinkle of amusement in his kind gray eyes, as he seated himself on the low step, with his long legs trailing off over the walk.

"Well, yes. I did n't know what else to call him, and as he 'd been delivered out of the hands of the Philistines——"

"That 's a good one!" cried the ranchman. "Come here, David. You 've got a name now as well as a locket. Do you hear that?"

David had established himself between his master and his rescuer, and looked from one to the other with evident satisfaction. They were soon engaged in an amicable conversation, quite unconscious of the picture they were forming. The tall ranchman, clad in full cow-boy paraphernalia, his extended legs encased in leathern "shaps" decorated with long fringes, his belt of rattlesnake-skin, his loose shirt showing a triangle of bronzed throat, in his hand the broad sombrero clasped about with a silver band.

Little Mrs. Nancy sitting upright in her chair, in her neat old black gown, holding the forgotten bonnet in her lap, watched her picturesque visitor with the greatest interest. And looking up into the delicate little old face, he noted all the sweetness and brightness which had so long been lost upon the world. To make a clean breast of it, the two fell frankly in love with each other upon the spot, and before the stranger had departed, he had persuaded her to visit his ranch with him the very next Sunday.

"But I don't know what to call you," she said, after having agreed upon this wild escapade.

"That 's so," said he. "I go by the name of Wat Warren out here, but they used to call me Walter at home. I wish you would call me Walter."

"It 's a pretty name," she said. "I thought some of calling my boy Walter at first."

Warren was on the point of departure, and a sudden embarrassment seemed to seize him. He had his hand in his trousers' pocket. "I 'most forgot the money for the license," he stammered, as he pulled out a couple of silver dollars.

Nobody knows what came over Mrs. Nancy, but she suddenly found she could not take the money.

"Oh, that's of no consequence," she said, quite as though she had had at her command the whole treasury surplus of a few years ago. "I should like to make David a present of the license;" and as her two visitors departed at full gallop, she sat down in a flutter of pleasurable excitement.

How surprising it all was! She looked back upon the last hour quite incredulous. She felt as though she had known this strange young man all her life. Not that he had told her much about his own concerns. On the contrary, after complimenting her on the subject of David's collar and David's bath, he had got her talking about herself; and she had told him about Willie, and about Atchison, and about her desire to go home to New England.

"My sakes!" said she to herself; "what a chatterbox I'm getting to be in my old age! What must he have thought of me?" But in her heart she knew he had not thought any harm of her confidence. There had been no mistaking the sympathy in that sunburnt face, and if there had been any doubt remaining, the hearty grip of the rough hand, which she still

felt upon her palm, would have set her mind quite at rest.

But if Mrs. Nancy wondered at herself on Tuesday, she had fairly lost all track of her own identity when, on Sunday, she found herself seated beside her broad-shouldered friend in a light wagon, bowling over the prairies behind a pair of frisky four-year-olds, while David bounded beside them or scampered about in the vain pursuit of prairie-dogs.

"Do you feel afraid?" asked her host, looking protectingly down upon the tiny figure at his side.

"Not a mite," she declared. "I never was one of the scary kind."

They had left the mountains behind them and were speeding to the eastward. It seemed to her that a few hours of this rapid progress would bring them to the very shores of the Atlantic. On and on they went over the undulating yellow plains. As they neared the top of each rise of ground Mrs. Nancy's heart stood still in a strange fantastic suspense. Would there be trees over beyond, or lakes, or rivers, or perhaps a green New England meadow?

"Isn't it like sailing?" said her companion as they bowled along.

"I never went sailing," Mrs. Nancy replied. "I 've only been out in a boat on the pond, and I think this is pleasanter."

They did little talking on that drive. Mrs. Nancy was too entirely absorbed in her new experience to have much to say. But when at last they reached the ranch, lying like an oasis in the vast barren, with young corn sprouting in the wide fields, and a handful of cotton-wood trees clustered about the house, the tears fairly started to the little woman's eyes, so much did this bit of rural landscape remind her of her own far-away New England. And when the master of the house led the way into a neat little room, with a south window looking across the plains, it came his turn for confidences.

"This room was built on for my mother," he said.

"Did she live here with you?"

"No; she died before she could get here."

"Oh dear!" said his little visitor.

The two small words were eloquent with sympathy.

That was a red-letter day for Mrs. Nancy Tarbell. She felt as though she were getting a glimpse of the great West for the first time in all these years. When her host casually

informed her that he owned about seven square miles of land and two hundred head of cattle, she gave a little gasp of amazement.

"I always wanted to see a cattle ranch," she said.

"Oh, this is no cattle ranch. It 's only a dairy." And he took her about through the many sheds and barns, which were hidden in a hollow a few rods away. Here he showed her his ice-houses, his huge churns, and his mammoth "separator" that went whirling around, dividing the cream from hundreds of gallons of milk in the time it would have taken her to skim a couple of three-pint pans.

"Sakes alive!" she exclaimed again and again, as these wonders were explained to her —"sakes alive! what would our folks say to that?"

"You 'll have a great deal to tell them when you go back," said Warren, studying her animated face.

"If I ever go," she said, with a little sigh.

This was after dinner, which had been a savory meal served by a man cook.

"Do you want very much to go?"

"Oh yes! I shall go just as soon as ever Atchison begins to pay again. I hope I

have n't any false pride," she added, deprecatingly, " but I can live cheaper here than I should be willing to there, where I 've seen better days."

Brave little Mrs. Nancy ! It was not indeed false pride that deterred her, but the fear of being a burden to others.

They were sitting in the big living-room, which on this great occasion had been made as neat as her own little parlor. Antlers and other strange trophies ornamented the walls, where also guns and spurs and lassos hung. The little woman did not seem in the least out of place among these warlike objects. She sat in an old leathern chair, her feet on a coyote-skin, looking about her with quick bright motions that made the big fellow think of the shy field creatures that sometimes strayed over his threshold—ground squirrels, rabbits, and the like. David lay curled up close beside her, and half a dozen less-favored dogs looked wistfully in from time to time. Warren was wondering whether she could possibly fit in naturally to the stiff, scant New England life which he had fled away from when a boy. Presently he said :

" Have you any idea how much your house and land are worth ? "

"Oh yes! We paid ten hundred and fifty dollars for it when the house was new, but it's a good deal out of repair now."

"But you know real estate is pretty high here just now."

Struck by the peculiar emphasis with which he spoke, Mrs. Nancy gave him a startled look. "Why—why—what do you mean?"

"Well, I was talking with a real-estate man about the value of land the other day, and he said you could realize six thousand dollars on your place any day."

"Six—thousand—dollars?"

"Yes, six thousand dollars."

"Why, that's just what we had in Atchison!"

"Well, I guess there's no question but that you could get that for your land to-morrow."

It had indeed been an eventful day, and it was followed by a sleepless night. For years little Mrs. Nancy had had one great wish, and suddenly it was to be fulfilled. She could go home—home to New England, to the village where she was born, to the village where everybody knew her, where they would talk of Willie. Through the hours of the night, which sped fast, she thought and thought of the home-coming. She passed in review all

her old neighbors, forgetting for the moment how many would be found missing ; she wandered in spirit through the familiar pastures, beneath the green trees, beside the pond at the foot of the hill. Suddenly a strange suggestion intruded itself upon her thoughts. Must it not be "kind o' damp" with all that swamp land so near by, and the great elm-trees so close about the house? Her house no longer, however. It had passed into the hands of strangers —city people, whom she did not know. She wondered where she should live. She should want to be independent, and she should hate to "board out."

But with the alloy of perplexity her radiant visions faded, and she fell asleep. For the first time in all these years the milkman found locked doors. He would not disturb the "little widdy," but when he had left the can upon the back steps he turned away, feeling somewhat aggrieved.

The next morning, after her house was set in order and her marketing done, Mrs. Nancy sat herself down in her porch to darn her stockings. She had formed the habit, for Willie's sake, of doing all the work possible out in the air and sunshine, and she still clung to all the habits that were associated with him.

Her weekly darning was a trifling piece of work, for every hole which ventured to make its appearance in those little gray stockings was promptly nipped in the bud.

The water was merrily flowing in the irrigating ditch, a light breeze was rustling in the cotton woods before the door, while the passing seemed particularly brisk. Two small boys went cantering by on one bareback horse; a drove of cattle passed the end of the street two or three rods away, driven by mounted cow-boys; a collection of small children in a donkey cart halted just before her door, not of their own free will, but in obedience to a caprice of the donkey's. They did not hurt Mrs. Nancy's feelings by cudgelling the fat little beast, but sat laughing and whistling and coaxing him until, of his own accord, he put his big flapping ears forward as though they had been sails, and ambled on. There were pretty turnouts to watch, and spirited horses, and Mrs. Nancy found her mind constantly wandering from what she meant should be the subject of her thoughts.

When the postman appeared around the corner he came to her gate and lifted the latch. It was not time for her small bank dividend. The letter must be from her husband's sister-

in-law, who wrote to her about twice a year. As Mrs. Nancy sat down to read the letter her eyes rested for a moment upon the mountains.

"If Almira could have come with the letter she 'd have thought those snowy peaks well worth the journey," she said to herself. And then she read the letter.

Here it is:

"DEAR NANCY,—Excuse my long silence, but I 've been suffering from rheumatism dreadfully, and have n't had the spirit to write to anybody but my Almira. It 's been so kind of lonesome since she went away that I guess that 's why the rheumatism got such a hold of me. When you ain't got anybody belonging to you, you get kind of low-spirited. Then the weather—it 's been about as bad as I ever seen it. Not a good hard rain, but a steady drizzle-drozzle day after day. You can't put your foot out of doors without getting your petticoats draggled. But you 'll want to hear the news. Cousin Joshua he died last month, and the place was sold to auction. Deacon Stebbins bought it low. He 's getting harder-fisted every year. Eliza Stebbins she 's pretty far gone with lung trouble, living in that damp old place; but he won't hear to making any change, and she ain't got life enough left to ask for it. Both her boys is off to Boston. Does seem as though you could n't hold the young folks here with ropes, and I don't know who 's going to run the farms and the corner store when we 're gone. Going pretty fast we be too. They 've

been eight deaths in the parish since last Thanksgiving—Mary Jane Evans and me was counting them up last sewing circle. Mr. Williams, the new minister, made out as we 'd better find a more cheerful subject; but we told him old Parson Edwards before him had given us to understand that it was profitable and edifying to the spiritual man to dwell on thoughts of death and eternity. They do say that Parson Williams would be glad to get another parish. He 's a stirring kind of man, and there ain't overmuch to stir, round here. I sometimes wish I could get away myself. I 'd like to go down to Boston and board for a spell, jest to see somebody passing by; but they say board 's high down there and living 's poor; and, after all, it 's about as easy to stick it out here. I don't know though 's I wonder that you feel 's you do about coming home. 'T ain't what you 're used to out West, and I don't suppose you ever feel real easy in your mind from cow-boys and Indians and wild animals. I was reading only yesterday about a grizzly-bear that killed a man right there in the Rocky Mountains, and I 'm glad you feel 's you do about coming home. I should like to think that you 'd be here to close my eyes at the last.

"But no more at present. This is quite a letter for me. Your true friend,

"Almira Tarbell.

"P.S.—You remember my old tabby that I set such store by? She died along in March, and I buried her under the sugar-maple side of the barn. The maples did n't do as well this year."

"Poor Almira," said the little widow, folding the letter with a sigh; "she 's having a real hard time. I do feel for her, I declare."

An hour after, when her new friends Warren and David came to inquire how she had borne the fatigues of her yesterday's drive, they found her sitting with the letter in her hands. There was a bright flush on her cheeks, and a look of perplexity in her blue eyes.

"Fine day, is n't it?" said Warren, while David wagged his tail till it almost touched his ears.

"Yes, it 's a very fine day. 'Pears to me Colorado never did look so nice as it does to-day."

"That is because you are thinking of leaving us," Warren rejoined, thoughtfully pulling the ears of David, who could scarcely contain himself for joy at being the object of such a flattering attention.

"I don't know 's I should be in such a hurry to go right straight away, even if I could sell my land," said the widow, slipping the letter into her pocket with a guilty air.

They chatted awhile in the bright sunshine, and Warren soon had an inkling of the little woman's state of mind.

"I don't suppose, now, you 'd be willing to

take a ground-rent on the other half of your land if a desirable party should apply? A rent, say, for five years, with the privilege of purchase at the expiration of the term?"

The long words sounded very technical and business-like, yet rather agreeable too.

"You mean somebody might like to build on my land?"

"That 's the idea," said Warren. "Fact is," he went on, after a pause, "I happen to know a nice, steady young fellow who is thinking of getting married. He told me he would be willing to pay $300 and taxes."

"Three hundred dollars!" cried the wondering little land-owner. "Why, I should feel like a rich woman!"

"Well, the land 's worth it, and the young man 's able to pay."

The air was growing warmer and sweeter every minute, and the water in the irrigating ditch sounded quite jubilant as it raced past the house. Yes, Colorado was a pleasant place to live in, especially with Walter Warren for a neighbor only ten miles away. The ranch did not seem at all far off since that rapid drive across the prairies.

She sat so long silent that her visitor felt he must offer greater inducements. He began

pulling David's ears so vigorously that a dog of a less refined perception might have howled remonstrance, and then, while the color deepened in the sunburnt face and an engaging shyness possessed him, Warren said, "Perhaps you 'd take more kindly to the arrangement if you knew who the young man was?"

"My dear, are you going to get married?" cried Mrs. Nancy, forgetting alike her perplexities and her dreams of opulence.

"Well, yes, I am; some time next fall. She lives back East; and I thought it would be nice to have a little place in town where we could stay through the off seasons. You 'll let us come, won't you?" he cried, with a look of boyish beseeching. "I know you would if you could see Jenny. *She 's so sweet!*"

The momentous visit was over; Warren had had his turn at confidences, and was now striding down the street, with David at his heels.

The little widow stood at the gate, her heart feeling bigger and warmer than for many a long day. Once more she looked down under the row of cotton woods, which had come into full leaf during the past week, looked to where her giant mountain neighbor stood, strong and constant as an old friend.

The air seemed clearer, the sunshine brighter, than ever before. The running stream was singing its own gay song, and for once it waked no longing in her breast. As Mrs. Nancy turned to walk up the path, she drew forth Almira's letter, not without a momentary pang of remorse. With the letter in her hand she paused again, and looked and listened as though she would drink in the whole of Colorado at one draught. Suddenly a gleam of roguish wilfulness came into the sweet old face, and speaking half aloud, she murmured,

"I don't know but I'm getting to be a heartless old woman, but—I 'm afraid I 'd full as lief somebody else closed Almira's eyes for her!"

And with this revolutionary sentiment the faithless little New Englander passed into the house that had at last taken on the dignity and the preciousness of a home.

II.

BRIAN BORU.

SIR BRYAN PARKHURST, a young Irish sportsman just over from the old country, was rather disappointed in Colorado; and that was a pity, considering that he had crossed an ocean and half a continent to get there. The climate, to be sure, was beyond praise, and climate is what Colorado is for, as any resident of Springtown will tell you. Nature, too, was very satisfactory. He liked the way the great mass of Rocky Mountains thrust itself up, a mighty barrier against the west, perfectly regardless of scenic conventionalities. There was something refreshingly democratic about the long procession of peaks, seeming to be all of about the same height. In that third week of September not a single one of them all wore the ermine, though their claim to that distinction, measured by their altitude, equalled that of their snow-clad cousins of another hemi-

sphere. On the other hand, Sir Bryan pleased himself with fancying that the splashes of golden aspen and crimson sumac on the mountain sides, contrasting with the brilliant, unalterable blue of the sky, had a Star-Spangled-Banner effect—a thing which the British tourist is always delighted to discover.

Truth to tell, it was the people that bothered Sir Bryan. In dress, in manners,—he sometimes feared in morals, they lacked the strong flavor which he had confidently looked for. They did not wear flannel shirts in general society; they did not ask impertinent questions; a whiskey cocktail did not seem to play a necessary part in the ceremony of introduction; the almighty dollar itself did not stalk through every conversation, putting the refinements of life to the blush. In short, Sir Bryan found himself forced to base his regard for his new acquaintances upon such qualities as good breeding, intelligence, and a cordial yet discriminating hospitality,—qualities which he was perfectly familiar with at home.

He sometimes wondered whether the taint of civilization might not already have attached itself to the grizzly bear and the mountain lion, for whose inspiring acquaintance he had ardently pined since boyhood. He was on the

eve of going to pay his respects to these worthies in their own mountain fastnesses, and, meanwhile, was getting himself in training by walking great distances with a rifle over his shoulder.

In the course of the last of his extended tramps—for he was due to join that inveterate sportsman, Lord Longshot, at Denver, on the following day,—he found himself passing through a wilderness of loveliness. He had entered what he would have termed, with the genial inaccuracy of his race, a "boundless enclosure," and having crossed a vast, yellowish field, populous with scrawny cattle and self-important prairie-dogs, he was following a well-marked road, which led alluringly up hill. Thousands of scrub-oaks, in every shade of bronze and russet, massed themselves on either hand, and in among them tufts of yellow asters shone, and here and there a belated gilia tossed its feathery plume. Scattered groups of pine trees that scorn the arid plains were lording it over the bolder slopes of the mountain side. The steep road went on its winding way, after the manner of its kind, dipping occasionally to meet a bridge of planks, beneath which flowed a stream of autumn colors. After a while Sir Bryan found the ascent too

gradual for his ambition, and, leaving the road to make its way as it would, he pushed upwards through the bushes. Every step brought him nearer the gigantic crags which formed the buttresses of the mountain, and looked wild and impregnable enough to be the haunt of the grizzly himself.

The young man's thoughts were dwelling fondly upon the grizzly of his dreams, when he beheld a sight that sent the blood back to his heart with a rush. Not fifty yards away, in a sunny opening, lay a mass of brownish fur which could belong to nobody but a bear *in propria persona*. Great Cæsar! Could it be possible? Almost too agitated to breathe, Sir Bryan moved cautiously toward the creature, covering it with his rifle. The bear, with the politeness which appeared to cling to all classes of society in this effetely civilized West, rose up and sat on his haunches, facing his visitor. Sir Bryan fired and the bear tumbled over like a ninepin.

Sir Bryan Parkhurst, as became a young Irish baronet, had enjoyed his share of sensations in life. A year previous he had almost broken his neck riding across country, and had won the brush into the bargain. He had once saved a man from drowning on the coast of Corn-

wall. He had come into his title unexpectedly, and made his new tenantry adore him. To crown all, he had, at a still poignantly recent date, practically refused the hand of an English heiress. But he had never before shot a bear, nor indeed had he ever seen one outside the Zoo. As he steadfastly regarded the heap of brown fur, a sinister doubt invaded his mind. Might it be a cow, after all? Forgetful of the well-established fact in natural history that cows never sit on their haunches, even with a view to serving as target to an ambitious sportsman, he cautiously approached his victim.

It was unquestionably a bear, though not of a terrific aspect. Sir Bryan examined the lifeless body with the keenest interest. He had seen a domestic pig which would have weighed more; he had encountered more than one dog of a more dangerous appearance; yet, when all was said, a bear was a bear.

Sir Bryan seated himself upon a rock to reflect upon his next step. It was close upon midday. He thought he must be some eight miles from town. When he had enjoyed his bear for a few minutes, he would return there and get some men to come and cart the carcass to town. He would have the skin removed and cured, and the meat—

"Brian! Brian Boru!"

The words came ringing up the mountain slope in a bell-like soprano. Why should a bell-like soprano call the name of the old Irish king in this remote wilderness? Was there witchery at work? Was the bear merely a part of the phantasmagoria of an enchanted region?

Sir Bryan, undeterred by these suggestions of his fancy, lifted up his voice and shouted "Hulloo!" and behold! a few minutes later, a horse came pushing through the scrub-oaks, bearing upon his back an enchanted princess. As was to be expected of a Colorado princess, enchanted or otherwise, she had not quite the traditional appearance. In lieu of a flowing robe of spotless white, she was clad in a plain black skirt and a shirt waist of striped cambric, while the golden fillet, if such she wore, was quite concealed by a very jaunty sailor-hat, than which no fillet could have been more becoming. In short, the pleasing vision which Sir Bryan beheld was far more to his taste than any princess of fairy lore could have been. As he sprang to his feet and lifted his hat he wondered whether the expression "nut-brown maid" was poetry. If so, he had performed an unprecedented feat in recalling it so aptly.

There is a difference in the way men lift their hats, and Sir Bryan's way was a charming one.

"Did you call?" asked the nut-brown maid.

"No; I only answered when I heard you call my name."

"Is your name Brian Boru?" she inquired, with animation.

"I am an Irishman, and my name is Bryan, so they used to call me Brian Boru."

"How very curious! That is the name of my bear!"

"Of your bear?" he repeated in blank amazement.

"Yes. Have you seen anything of him? I'm a little near-sighted and——"

Sir Bryan Parkhurst never shirked a dilemma.

"I've just shot a bear," he blurted out, "but I hope, with all my heart, it was n't yours!"

"Shot a bear?" cried the girl, in consternation. "Oh! how could you?"

Before Sir Bryan could reach out a helping hand, her feet were on the ground.

"Where is he? Oh! where is he?" she cried in tragic accents.

Sir Bryan pointed to the prostrate form of the murdered bear. Alas! It must have been

her bear, for she knelt down beside him, and gazed upon him long and mournfully.

And truly there was something pathetic about the victim, viewed from this new standpoint. He lay on his side, exposing the wound, which was clotted with blood. His small eyes were open, and a red tongue just visible between his parted teeth. One short, rigid, foreleg was stretched out as though in remonstrance, and just within its embrace a fading spray of gilia lifted its fragile blossoms.

Sir Bryan stood lost in contemplation of this singular scene; the graceful figure of the kneeling girl, bending over the mass of coarse brown fur; the flower, standing unscathed close beside the long, destructive claws. A few yards away, the horse lazily whisked his tail, while to the right the frowning crags rose, so near and steep that they seemed about to topple over and make an end of the improbable situation.

At last the girl lifted her head, murmuring, "Straight through the heart!"

The sportsman's vanity gave a little throb. It was a pretty shot, by Jove! He moved nearer.

"I 'm no end sorry about it," he declared.

Alas, for that throb of vanity! His contrition did not have the true ring.

The girl turned upon him with quick distrust. No, he was more glad than sorry.

"If we were in England," she cried, with withering scorn, "you would have to be more than sorry."

"In England?"

"Yes, in England, or in Ireland, or anywhere round there. If I 'd shot so much as a miserable pheasant on your land you 'd have —you 'd have *had me up before the bailey!*"

Clearly the girl's reading of English fiction had confused her ideas of British magistracy. But Sir Bryan was generous, and overlooked side issues.

"Is this your land?" he asked, gazing at the wild mountain side, and then at the flaming cheeks of the girl. She stood there like an animated bit of autumn coloring.

"Of course it 's my land," she declared.

"But I did n't know it was your land."

"You knew it was n't *yours!*" she cried vehemently.

Poor Sir Bryan was hopelessly bewildered. The great West was, after all, not quite like the rest of the world, if charming young ladies owned the mountain sides, danced attendance

upon by bears of dangerous aspect and polished manners. He blushed violently, but he did not look in the least awkward.

"I wish you would tell me your name," he said, feeling that if this remarkable young lady possessed anything so commonplace as a name, the knowledge of it might place him on a more equal footing with her.

"Certainly, Mr. Bryan," she replied. "My name is Merriman; Kathleen Merriman," and she looked at him with great dignity but with no relenting.

"Well, Miss Merriman, I don't suppose there 's any good in talking about it. My being awfully sorry does n't help matters any. I don't see that there 's anything to be done about it, but to have the carcass carted off your land as soon as may be."

"Carted off my land!" the girl cried, with kindling indignation. "You need not trouble yourself to do anything of the kind." Then, with a sudden change to the elegiac, she fixed her mournful gaze upon her departed friend and said, "I shall bury him where he lies!"

In this softened mood she seemed less formidable, and Sir Bryan so far plucked up his spirit as to make a suggestion.

"Perhaps I could help you," he said. "If

I had a shovel, or something, I think I could dig a first-rate grave."

The fair mourner looked at him doubtfully, and then she looked at his namesake, and apparently the poetic justice of the thing appealed to her.

"There 's a spade over at the house," she said, "and I don't know that it 's any more than fair that you should bury him."

Sir Bryan's spirits rose still higher at the hope of partial expiation of his crime ; but with his rising spirits came a premonition of a good healthy appetite which would soon be due, and he asked meekly : "Would you mind, then, if I were to go back to town first, to get something to eat? A person does n't dig so well, I suppose, on an empty stomach."

"No, you 'd better stay and get your dinner with me. It will take you pretty much all day to bury Brian. You probably never buried a bear before," she added, as patronizingly as if she herself had been a professional grave-digger, "and you don't know what a piece of work it 's going to be."

They started to push their way through the scrub-oaks.

"Shall I lead your horse for you?" Sir Bryan asked.

"No, thank you. Comrag will follow, all right;" and Comrag did follow, so close upon their heels, that Sir Bryan was in momentary expectation of being trampled upon.

Comrag was an unbeautiful beast, and he permitted himself startling liberties; crowding himself in between his mistress and her companion, helping himself without ceremony to a bunch of asters which Sir Bryan had in his hand, and neighing straight into the young baronet's ear as they came in sight of the house.

The "house" was a mere hut, painted red, entirely dwarfed by an ungainly chimney of rough stone. The little hut was built against a huge boulder, which towered above the chimney itself, and looked as though it had stood there since the foundation of the earth. There was a rustic veranda along the front of this diminutive dwelling, which stood on a slight eminence; and, as Sir Bryan stepped upon the veranda, he drew a long breath of amazement and delight. Looking down over the broad, oak-clad slope of the mountain, he beheld the vast sea of the prairie, stretching for leagues upon leagues away to the low horizon. From that height the view seemed limitless, and the illusion of the sea, which

always hovers over the prairies, was complete.

As his hostess came out with a long-handled spade in her hand, he cried, "That is the most magnificent thing I ever saw!"

She did not answer immediately, but stood leaning upon the spade, and gazing forth as intently as if it had been to her too a revelation.

Then she drew a long breath and said, in a rapt tone, as though the words came to her one by one: "Yes, it makes you feel sometimes as if your soul would get away from you."

They stood there for a while, watching the cloud-shadows swimming upon that mystic sea. The smoke of an express train on the horizon seemed fairly to crawl, so great was the distance.

"That looks like the smoke of a steamer," Sir Bryan observed.

"Then you think it seems like the sea, as everybody else does," she answered. "I never saw the sea, myself, but I don't believe it can be finer than this."

There was another pause, and then, with a sudden change of mood, to which she seemed subject, the rapt worshipper turned her thoughts to practical things, saying briskly: "Here 's your spade, Mr. Bryan. You had

better go and begin, while I get the dinner. I 'll fire a shot when it 's ready.

Sir Bryan obediently took the spade.

"How am I to find my way to the bear?" he asked.

All about the little clearing was an unbroken wilderness of scrub-oaks, gorgeous but bewildering.

"Why, you can just follow Comrag's tracks," she said, pointing toward the spot where the hoof-prints emerged from the brush. "You 'd better leave your rifle here," she added with some asperity, "You might take a fancy to shoot Comrag if he strayed your way."

It was Sir Bryan Parkhurst's first attempt at digging, and he devoutly hoped it might be his last. He thought at first that he should never get his spade inserted into the earth at all, so numerous and exasperating were the hindrances it met with. The hardest and grittiest of stones, tangled roots, and solid cakes of earth, which seemed to cohere by means of some subterranean cement, offered a complicated resistance, which was not what he had expected of Mother Earth. He began to fear that that much bepraised dame was something of a vixen after all.

The other Brian lay, meanwhile, in all the dignity and solemnity of funeral state, awaiting burial. As Sir Bryan toiled at his thankless task he found himself becoming strangely impressed. There seemed to be a weird and awesome significance in the scene. He did not know why it was, but the beetling crags above him, the consciousness of the marvellous plains below, the rhythmic murmur of the wind in the pine trees near at hand, the curious impenetrableness of the old earth, the kingship of death asserting itself in the motionless brute which he had killed, but which he was powerless to make alive again—all these weird and unaccustomed influences seemed to be clutching at his imagination, taking liberties with his sense of identity. He had just about reached the conclusion that it was all a mistake about his being anybody in particular, when a shot rang out and reminded him that he was, at any rate, ravenously hungry.

Five minutes later he had washed his hands at the toy sink of a toy kitchen and was seated at a snowy table on the little veranda, partaking of a mutton stew which seemed a dish fit for the gods.

It had been something of a shock to Sir

Bryan to find places laid for only two. He had never before enjoyed a *tête-à-tête* meal with a young lady, and it was some minutes before he could rid his mind of the impression that an irate chaperon was about to appear from behind the boulder, or, for the matter of that, from the depths of the earth itself. His recent experience of the difficulty of penetraing the surface of the earth might have given him a sense of security in that direction, had he not cherished an exaggerated opinion of the prowess of the traditional chaperon in thwarting the pleasures of the young. The comeliness, too, of his hostess led him, by inference, to suppose that the chaperon in question would prove to be of a peculiarly vicious and aggressive type. No such apparition came, however, to disturb his satisfaction, and he gradually came to believe in the lawfulness of the situation. His face may have betrayed something of the questionings which were racking his mind, for the self-possessed Kathleen, after heaping his plate with stew for the second time, gave him an elder-sisterly look, and said: "Mr. Bryan, you are such a very discreet young man, that I believe I will answer all the questions you are dying to ask."

Sir Bryan blushed, as he always hated him-

self for doing, and the nut-brown maid continued :

"Yes, I live here all alone. I am taking up a claim. No. Nobody molests me, and I get on beautifully. Sometimes my friends come up and spend a few days with me, but not often. Comrag and I do the marketing once or twice a week. I 've got a lovely cool cellar up against the boulder under the house."

All this she said like a child repeating a lesson she has learned by rote, which the teacher wants to hear, but which the child finds rather uninteresting. But Sir Bryan listened as if it had been the most exciting tale he had ever heard. Thus encouraged she proceeded with the dry statement of facts.

"I 've only got to stay here a month longer to secure the claim. I 've got three hundred acres, and it has cost me just three hundred dollars to take it up and to build my house and Comrag's stall. I could sell out to-morrow for five hundred dollars, but I don't know that I would sell for five thousand. Because I have such a beautiful time here. I feel somehow as if I had struck root."

Sir Bryan knew exactly what she meant. In spite of the sailor hat and shirt waist, she had the air of having grown up among the

rocks and glowing oak leaves. He said nothing, but his attentive attitude asked for more.

"Oh, yes! and about Brian Boru," she proceeded. "I found him last June, lying up against a tree with his leg broken. I fed him until his leg was mended, and—and"—with a little catch in her breath—"he adored me! See how green it looks off to the south," she hastened to add, brushing her hand across her eyes.

An hour after dinner, as Sir Bryan still labored at that contumacious grave, his hostess came and seated herself upon the rock, whence he, in the first flush of triumph, had surveyed the dead bear. Sir Bryan could not but feel flattered by this kind attention, and, being particularly anxious to acquit himself creditably before so distinguished a spectator, he naturally became more and more awkward at his work.

The young lady considerately divided her attention between the futile efforts of the amateur grave-digger and the flippant behavior of a black and white magpie, which was perched on the branch of a dead pine near by, derisively jerking its long tail. She wondered whether the magpie perhaps shared her astonishment, that an able-bodied son of Erin should

not take more naturally to a spade. She had supposed that, if there was one weapon that an Irishman thoroughly understood, it was that which her new acquaintance was struggling with. She cocked her head on one side, with something of a magpie air, while a little crease appeared between her eyebrows.

"Why don't you coax it a little more?" she suggested.

Sir Bryan straightened himself up and stood there, very red in the face, trying to make out whether she was laughing at him. Then he laughed at himself and said, "I believe you are right. I was getting vindictive."

After that he seemed to get on better.

They buried the bear just as the heavy shadow of the mountain fell across their feet. By the time the last clod of earth had fallen upon the grave, the mountain shadow had found its way a hundred miles across the plains, and a narrow golden rim, like a magic circlet, glimmered on the horizon.

"Do you never feel afraid?" he asked, as they walked back to the house.

"No. I suppose I ought to, but I don't. I was a little disappointed the first summer I was here, because nothing happened. It seemed such a chance. But somehow things don't

happen very often. Do you think they do? And now I'm a good deal older and more experienced, and I don't expect adventures. I'm almost twenty-five," she declared, with the pardonable pride of advancing years.

There was that in Sir Bryan's face as well as in his character which had always invited confidence. Consequently it did not seem to him in the least degree unnatural that this charming girl should tell him about herself, as they walked side by side along the lonely mountain slope, in the fading light.

"I forgot to tell you," she was saying, "that I am a trained nurse. I came out West from Iowa with a sick lady who died very soon, and I liked the mountains, and so I stayed."

"And you've given up nursing?"

"Oh, no. In the winter season I am always busy. I could n't afford to give up nursing, and I don't believe I should want to. It's lovely to help people when they are suffering. You get almost to feel as though they belonged to you, and I have n't anybody belonging to me."

All this was said in a tone of soliloquy, without a trace of self-consciousness. Miss Kathleen Merriman seemed to find it quite natural

that she should stand alone and unprotected in the world. But somehow it conflicted with all Sir Bryan's articles of faith. Women were intended to be taken care of, especially young and pretty women. A feeling of genuine tenderness came over him and a longing to protect this brave young creature. There was, to be sure, something about the way her head was set upon her shoulders, that made him doubt whether it would be easy to acquire the right to take care of her. But that made the task all the more tempting. The old song that every Irishman loves was in his thoughts. He felt an impulse, such as others had felt in this young lady's presence, to whisper: "Kathleen Mavourneen." He tried to fancy the consequences of such a bold step, but he did not venture to face them. He therefore contented himself with observing that the air had grown very chilly.

They had reached the little veranda once more, and Sir Bryan was not invited to tarry. The girl stood there in the deepening twilight, a step above him, leaning upon the spade he had delivered up, and looking out across the shadowy plains, and Sir Bryan could think of no possible excuse for staying any longer. As he flung his rifle over his shoulder and made a

motion to go, she held out her hand, with a sudden friendly impulse, and said: "I was very unjust this morning. You could n't possibly have known, and it was very kind of you to bury him."

Sir Bryan murmured a remorseful word or two, and then he started down the mountain side.

"Good-bye," he cried, across the scrub-oaks that were growing dark and indistinct.

"Good-bye, Mr. Bryan," came the answer, sounding shrill and near through the intervening distance.

As he looked back, a huge, ungainly form thrust itself before the slender figure. A great dark head stood out against the light shirt-waist the girl wore, and he perceived that Comrag had strolled from his stall for a friendly good-night.

"The only friend she has left now," Sir Bryan reflected in sorrowful compunction.

He strode down the mountain at a good pace. Now and then a startled rabbit crossed his path, and once his imagination turned a scrub-oak into the semblance of a bear. But he gave no heed to these apparitions. His sportsman's instinct had suffered a check.

By the time Sir Bryan had reached the out-

skirts of the town, the stars were out. He looked up at the great mountain giant that closed the range at the south. Wrapped in darkness and in silence it stood against the starry sky. He tried to imagine that he could perceive a twinkling light from the little cabin, but none was visible. The enchantment of the mountain-side had already withdrawn itself into impregnable shadow.

"Jove!" he said to himself, as he turned into the prosaic town. "If I were an American, or something of that sort, I 'd go up there again."

Being, however, a young Irish baronet, as shy of entanglements with his own kind as he was eager for encounters with wild beasts, he very wisely went his way the next morning, and up to this time has never beheld mountain or maiden again.

Over the grave which Sir Bryan dug, there stands to-day a stout pine board, upon which may be read the following legend :

" Here lies the body of
Brian Boru,
shot through the heart
and subsequently buried
by an agreeable Paddy
of the same name."

Every year, however, the inscription becomes somewhat less legible and it is to be feared that all record of the poor bear will soon be lost.

III.

JAKE STANWOOD'S GAL.

JACOB STANWOOD was not the only college-bred man, stranded more or less like a disabled hull, upon the prairie sea of Colorado. Within the radius of a hundred miles—no great distance as prairie miles are reckoned,—there were known to be some half dozen of the fraternity, putting their superior equipment to the test, opposing trained minds and muscles to the stubborn resistance of an ungenial nature. The varying result of the struggle in different cases would seem to indicate that it is moral fibre which nature respects and submits to, rather than any acquired advantages.

In Jacob Stanwood's case there was no such test applied, for there was absolutely no struggle. He would have found it much easier to send a bullet through his brain than to put that organ to any violent exertion. Up

to this time, the alternative had not been presented to him, but he sometimes fancied that he saw it coming. At such times he would philosophize over himself and fate, until he had exhausted those two great subjects, and then, in a quiet and gentlemanly way, he would drown speculation in the traditional dram. He never drank anything but "Old Rye," and he flattered himself that he did so only when he pleased. If he somewhat misapprehended his relation with old rye, it was perhaps no wonder; for in his semi-occasional encounters with this gentlemanly intoxicant, his only witnesses and commentators were his collie dogs, and they never ventured upon an opinion in the matter.

When he was in a good mood Stanwood would sit in his doorway of a summer evening, with the collies at his feet, and commune with nature as amicably as if she had been his best friend. Between his cabin door and "the range" stretched twenty miles of arid prairie; but when the sun was in the west, the wide expanse took on all the mystic hues that the Orientals love and seek to imitate, and he gazed across it to the towering peaks with a sense of ownership which no paternal acres, no velvet lawns, nor stately trees, could have

awakened in him. A row of telegraph-poles, which had doubtless once been trees, straggled along the line of the railroad, a few miles to the north, and his own windmill indicated the presence of water underground. But as far as the eye could reach not a living tree could be seen, not a glimmer of a lake or rivulet; only the palpitating plain and the soaring peaks, and at his feet the cluster of faithful friends, gazing, from time to time, with rapt devotion into his face.

On these meditative evenings Stanwood found a leisurely companionship in reminiscences of better days; reminiscences more varied and brilliant than most men have for solace. But it was part of his philosophy never to dwell on painful contrasts. Even in the memory of his wife, whom he had adored and lost, even into that memory he allowed no poignant element to enter. He thought of her strong and gay and happy, making a joy of life. He never permitted the recollection of her illness and death, nor of his own grief, to intrude itself. Indeed he had succeeded in reality, as well as in retrospect, in evading his grief. There had been a little daughter of six, who had formed part of the painful association which his temperament rebelled

against. Foregoing, in her favor, the life-interest in her mother's estate to which he was entitled, he had placed the child under the guardianship of an uncle whom he equally disliked and trusted, and, having thus disposed of his last responsibility, he had gone forth into what proved to be the very diverting world of Europe. The havoc which some ten years' sojourn wrought in his very considerable fortune would force one to the conclusion that he had amused himself with gambling; but whether in stocks, or at faro tables, or in some more subtle wise, was known only to himself.

He had returned to his own country by way of Japan and San Francisco, and then he had set his face to the East, with an idea that he must repair his shattered fortunes. When once the Rocky Mountains were crossed, however, and no longer stood as a bulwark between him and unpleasant realities, he suddenly concluded to go no farther. It struck him that he was hardly prepared for the hand-to-hand struggle with fortune which he had supposed himself destined to; it would be more in his line to take up a claim and live there as master, though it were only master of a desert.

The little daughter, with whom he kept up

a desultory correspondence, had expressed her regret in a letter written in the stiff, carefully worded style of "sweet sixteen," and he had never guessed the passion of disappointment which the prim little letter concealed.

This had happened five years ago. He had taken up his claim successfully, but there success ended. After four years or more of rather futile "ranching," he sold most of his stock to his men, who promptly departed with it, and proceeded to locate a claim a few miles distant. The incident amused him as illustrating the dignity of labor, and kindred philosophical theories which the present age seems invented to establish.

One horse, a couple of cows, and his six collie dogs of assorted ages and sizes, he still retained, and with their assistance he was rapidly making away with the few hundreds accruing from the sale of his stock and farming implements. He had placed the money in the bank at Cameron City, a small railroad-station in a hollow five miles north of him, and it was when his eyes fell upon the rapidly diminishing monthly balance that he thought he saw coming that unpleasant alternative of which mention has been made.

He found no little entertainment, after the

departure of his men, in converting their late sleeping-apartment into what he was pleased to call a "museum." To this end nothing further was necessary, after removing all traces of their late occupancy, than that two old sole-leather trunks should render up their contents, consisting of half-forgotten souvenirs of travel. The change was magic. Unmounted photographs appeared upon the wall, an ivory Faust and Gretchen from Nuremberg stood, self-centred and unobservant, upon the chimney-shelf among trophies from Turkey, and Japan, Spain, and Norway. A gorgeous *kimono* served as curtain at the south window, a Persian altar-cloth at the west; and through the west window, the great Peak gazed with stolid indifference upon all that splendor, while the generous Colorado sunshine poured itself in at the south in unstinted measure, just as lavishly as if its one mission had been to illuminate the already gorgeous display.

And then, when all was done, Stanwood found to his surprise, that he still liked best to sit at his cabin-door, and watch the play of light on peak and prairie.

Late one afternoon, as he sat in the doorway, at peace with himself, and in agreeable harmony with the world as he beheld it, his

eye was caught by an indistinguishable object moving across the plain from the direction of Cameron City. He regarded it as he might have regarded the progress of a coyote or prairie-dog, till it stopped at his own gate, half a mile to the northward. A vague feeling of dissatisfaction came over him at the sight, but he did not disturb himself, nor make any remarks to the dogs on the subject. They however soon pricked up their ears, and sprang to their feet, excited and pleased. They were hospitable souls and welcomed the diversion of a visitor. As the wagon drew nearer, Stanwood observed that there was a woman sitting beside the driver; whereupon he repaired to his own room to give himself a hasty polish. The dogs began to bark in a friendly manner, and, under cover of their noise, the wagon came up and stopped before the door. Suddenly a rap resounded, and in acknowledgment of this unusual ceremony, the master of the house went so far as to pull on his best coat before stepping out into the main room. There in the doorway, cutting off the view of the Peak, stood a tall, well-dressed young woman, patting one of the dogs, while the others leaped, barking, about her.

Somewhat mystified by this apparition, Stan-

wood approached, and said; "Good-evening, madam."

"Good-evening," came the reply, in a rather agitated voice. "I 'm Elizabeth."

"The deuce you are!"

Struck, not by the unfatherly, but by the ungentlemanly nature of his response, Stanwood promptly gathered himself together, to meet the situation.

"Pray come in and take a seat," he said; and then, falling into the prairie speech: "Where are you stopping?"

The tall young lady, who had entered, but who had not taken the proffered seat, looked at him a moment, and then she came toward him with a swift, impulsive movement, and said: "Why, papa, I don't believe you know me! I 'm Elizabeth!"

"Yes, yes, oh, yes! I understand. But I thought perhaps you were paying a visit somewhere—some school friend, you know, or—or—yes—some school friend."

The girl was looking at him half bewildered, half solicitous. It was not the reception she had anticipated at the end of her two-thousand-mile journey. But then, this was not the man she had expected to see—this gaunt, ill-clad figure, with the worn, hollow-eyed face,

and the gray hair. Why, her father was only fifty years old, yet the lines she saw were lines of age and suffering. Suddenly all her feeling of perplexity and chagrin and wounded pride was merged in a profound tenderness. She drew nearer, extending both her hands, placed them gently upon his shoulders and said: "Will you please to give me a kiss?"

Stanwood, much abashed, bent his head toward the blooming young face, and imprinted a perfunctory kiss upon the waiting lips. This unaccustomed exercise completed his discomfiture. For the first time in his life he felt himself unequal to a social emergency.

A curious sensation went over Elizabeth. Somehow she felt as if she had been kissed by a total stranger. She drew back and picked up her small belongings. For a moment Stanwood thought she was going.

"Don't you get your mail out here any more?" she asked.

"Not very regularly," he replied, guiltily conscious of possessing two or three illegible letters from his daughter which he had not yet had the enterprise to decipher.

"Then you did not expect me?"

"Well, no, I can't say I did. But"— with a praiseworthy if not altogether successful

effort—"I am very glad to see you, my dear."

The first half of this speech was so much more convincing than the last, that the girl felt an unpleasant stricture about her throat, and knew herself to be on the verge of tears.

"I could go back," she said, with a pathetic little air of dignity. "Perhaps you would not have any place to put me if I should stay."

"Oh, yes; I can put you in the museum"—and he looked at her with the first glimmer of appreciation, feeling that she would be a creditable addition to his collection of curiosities.

Elizabeth met his look with one of quick comprehension, and then she broke into a laugh which saved the day. It was a pleasant laugh in itself, and furthermore, if she had not laughed just at that juncture she would surely have disgraced herself forever by a burst of tears.

Cy Willows, meanwhile, believing that "the gal and her pa" would rather not be observed at their first meeting, had discreetly busied himself with the two neat trunks which his passenger had brought.

"Hullo, Jake!" he remarked, as the ranchman appeared at the door; "this is a great day for you, ain't it?"

The two men took hold of one of the trunks together, and carried it into the museum. When the door opened, Willows almost dropped his end from sheer amazement. He stood in the middle of the room, staring from Venus to altar-cloth, from altar-cloth to censer.

"Gosh!" he remarked at last. "Your gal's struck it rich!"

The "gal" took it more quietly. To her, the master of this fine apartment was not Jake Stanwood, the needy ranchman, but Jacob Stanwood, Esq., gentleman and scholar, to the manor born. She stepped to the window, and looked out across the shimmering plain to the rugged peaks and the warm blue slopes of "the range," and a sigh of admiration escaped her.

"Oh, papa!" she cried, "how beautiful it is!"

"And I'll be durned if 't wa' n't the mountings the gal was looking at all the time!" Cy Willows declared, when reporting upon the astonishing situation at the ranch.

Stanwood himself was somewhat impressed by the girl's attitude. The museum had come to seem to his long unaccustomed mind a very splendid apartment indeed. When, a few minutes later, Elizabeth joined him in the rudely

furnished living-room of the cabin, he felt something very like chagrin at her first observation.

"Oh, papa!" she cried. "I 'm so glad the rest of it is a real ranch house! I 've always wanted to see just how a real ranchman lives!"

He thought ruefully that she would soon learn, to her cost, how a very poverty-stricken ranchman lived. His examination of the larder had not been encouraging.

"I am afraid we shall have rather poor pickings for supper, my dear," he said apologetically. He called her "my dear" from the first; it seemed more non-committal and impersonal than the use of her name. He had not called a young lady by her first name for fifteen years.

"I have my dinner in the middle of the day," he went on, "and I seem to have run short of provisions this evening."

"I suppose you have a man-cook," she remarked, quite ignoring his apology.

"Yes," he replied grimly. "I have the honor to fill that office myself."

"Why; is n't there anybody else about the place?"

"No. I 'm 'out of help' just now, as old

Madam Gallup used to say. I don't suppose you remember old Madam Gallup."

"Oh, yes, I do! Mama used to have her to dinner every Sunday. She looked like a duchess, but when she died people said she died of starvation. That was the year after you went away," she added thoughtfully.

It seemed very odd to hear this tall young woman say "mama," and to realize that it was that other Elizabeth that she was laying claim to. Why, the girl seemed almost as much of a woman as her mother. Fifteen years! A long time to be sure. He ought to have known better than to have slipped into reminiscences at the very outset. Uncomfortable things, always—uncomfortable things!

He would not let her help him get the supper, and with a subtle perception of the irritation which he was at such pains to conceal, she forbore to press the point, and went, instead, and sat in the doorway, looking dreamily across the prairie.

Stanwood noted her choice of a seat, with a curious mixture of jealousy and satisfaction. He should be obliged either to give up his seat, or to share it for awhile; but then it was gratifying to know that the girl had a heart for that view.

And the girl sat there wondering vaguely why she was not homesick. Everything had been different from her anticipations. No one to meet her at Springtown; no letter, no message at the hotel. She had had some difficulty in learning how to reach Cameron City, and when, at last, she had found herself in the forlorn little prairie train, steaming eastward across the strange yellow expanse, unbroken by the smallest landmark, she had been assailed by strange doubts and questionings. At Cameron City, again, no longed-for, familiar face had appeared among the loungers at the station, and the situation and her part in it seemed most uncomfortable. When, however, she had made known her identity, and word was passed that this was "Jake Stanwood's gal," there were prompt offers of help, and she had soon secured the services of Cy Willows and his "team."

As she sat in the doorway, watching the glowing light, the sun dropped behind the Peak. She remembered how Cy had said he "had n't never heard Jake Stanwood speak of havin' a gal of his own." The shadow of the great mountain had fallen upon the plain, and a chill, half imaginary, half real, possessed itself of her. Was she homesick after all? She stood up and stepped out upon the prairie,

which had never yielded an inch of space before the cabin door. Off to the southward was a field of half-grown alfalfa that had taken on a weird, uncanny green in the first sunless light. She looked across to the remote prairie, and there, on the far horizon, the sunlight still shone, a golden circlet. No. She was not homesick ; anything but that ! She had been homesick almost ever since she could remember, but now she was in her father's house and everything must be well.

When Stanwood came to look for her he found her surrounded by the assiduous collies, examining with much interest the tall, ungainly windmill, with its broad wooden flaps.

On the whole, their first evening together was a pleasant one. Stanwood listened with amused appreciation to the account of her journey. She would be a credit to his name, he thought, out there in the old familiar world which he should never see again.

He had relinquished to her the seat on the door-step, and himself sat on a saw-horse outside the door, where the lamp-light struck his face. Her head and figure presented themselves to him as a silhouette, and somehow that suited him better than to see her features distinctly ; it seemed to keep their relation back

where it had always been, a sort of impersonal outline.

Elizabeth, for her part, thought that, for all his shabby clothes and thin, sunburnt face, her father was more manifestly a gentleman than any man she had ever seen.

She learned several things in the course of that conversation. She found that when she touched upon her reasons for coming to him, her feeling that they were only two and that they ought to be together, his eyes wandered and he looked bored; when she spoke of her mother he seemed uncomfortable.

Was she like her mother? No, he said, she was not in the least like her mother; he did not see that she took after anybody in particular. Then, as if to escape the subject, was her Uncle Nicholas as rabid a teetotaller as ever?

He liked best to hear about her school days and of the gay doings of the past year, her first year of "society."

"And you don't like society?" he asked at last, with a quizzical glance at her pretty profile. She had turned her eyes from the contemplation of his face, and seemed to be conjuring up interesting visions out of the darkness.

"Yes, I do!" she said with decision.

"You won't get much society out here," he

remarked, and his spirits rose again. Of course she would be bored to death without it.

"I like some things better than society," she replied.

"For instance?"

She turned her face full upon him, and boldly said, "You."

"The deuce you do!" he cried, and was instantly conscious that it was the second time that he had forgotten himself.

A little crinkle appeared in the silhouette of a cheek, and she said, "I do like to hear you say 'the deuce.' I don't believe Uncle Nicholas ever said 'the deuce' in his life."

"Nick was always a bore," Stanwood rejoined, more pleased with the implied disparagement of his pet aversion than with the very out-spoken compliment to himself.

"I think Uncle Nicholas has done his duty by me," Elizabeth remarked demurely, "but I am glad he has got through. I came of age last Monday, the day I started for Colorado."

"When did you decide to come?"

"About five years ago. I always meant to start on the 7th of June of this year."

"You make your plans a long way ahead. What is the next step on the program?"

"I have n't the least idea."

"For such a very decided young lady, is n't that rather odd?"

"There are some things one can't decide all by one's self."

"Such as?"

"The next step."

"Perhaps you will find it easier after a week or two of ranching."

"You don't think I am going to like ranching?"

"Hardly."

"Don't you like it?"

"Oh, I 'm an old man, with my life behind me."

The lamplight on his face was stronger than he was aware; Elizabeth saw a good deal in it which he was not in the habit of displaying to his fellow-creatures. She stooped, and patted one of the collies, and told him she thought she really ought to go to bed; upon which Stanwood rose with alacrity, and conducted her to the museum, which had been turned into a very habitable sleeping-room.

Having closed the door upon his latest "curiosity," Stanwood proceeded to perform a solemn rite in the light of the stars. He took his demijohn of old rye, and, followed by the six collies, he carried it out a few rods back of the

cabin, where he gravely emptied its contents upon the sandy soil. At the first remonstrating gulp of the demijohn, which seemed to be doing its best to arrest the flow, a strong penetrating aroma assailed his nostrils, but he never flinched. Great as his confidence was in his own supremacy in his peculiarly intimate relations with old rye, he did not wish to "take any chances" with himself.

The dogs stood around in an admiring circle, and sniffed perplexedly at the strange libation which was clearly not intended for their kind. Did they realize that it was poured before the altar of parental devotion? They stood there wagging their tails with great vigor, and never taking their eyes off their master's countenance. Perhaps they appreciated the odd, half-deprecating, half-satirical expression of the face they knew so well. It would have been a pity if somebody had not done so. It is to be feared, however, that the remark with which Stanwood finally turned away from the odorous pool and walked toward the house was beyond the comprehension of the canine intellect. To himself, at least, the remorseful pang was very real with which he said, half aloud, "Pity to waste good liquor like that! Some poor wretch might have enjoyed it."

The morning following his visitor's arrival, the two drove together in the rattling old ranch wagon to Cameron City. Elizabeth was enchanted with the ingenious introduction of odd bits of rope into the harness, by means of which the whole establishment was kept from falling apart. She thought the gait of the lazy old nag the most amusing exhibition possible, and as for the erratic jolts and groans of the wagon, it struck her that this was a new form of exercise, the pleasurable excitement and unexpectedness of which surpassed all former experiences. At Cameron City she made purchase of a saddle-horse, a very well-made bronco with dramatic possibilities in his eye.

"I don't know where you will get a side-saddle," Stanwood had demurred when the purchase was first proposed.

"A side-saddle? I have it in my trunk."

"You don't say so! I should think it would jam your bonnets."

"Oh, I packed it with my ranch outfit."

So they jogged and rattled over to Cameron City, where Elizabeth had made the acquisition, not only of a saddle-horse, but of two or three most interesting new acquaintances.

"I do like the people so much, papa," she

declared as they drove out of town, having left the new horse to be shod.

"You don't mind their calling you 'Jake Stanwood's gal'?"

"No, indeed! I think it 's perfectly lovely!"

"It cannot but be gratifying to me," Stanwood remarked, in the half-satirical tone he found easiest in conversation with this near relative; "in fact, I may say it *is* gratifying to me, to find that the impression is mutually favorable. Halstead, the ruffianly looking sheep-raiser who called you 'Madam,' confided to me that you were the first woman he had ever met who knew the difference between a horse and a cow; and Simmons, the light-haired man who looks like a deacon, but who is probably the worst thief in four counties, told me I ought to be proud of 'that gal'!"

"Oh, papa, what gorgeous compliments! Don't you want a swap?"

"A what?"

"A swap. That 's what we call it when we pay back one compliment with another."

He turned and looked at her with an amused approval which was almost paternal.

"It is most refreshing," he said, "to have the vocabulary of the effete West enlivened with these breezy expressions from the growing East."

"But, papa, you must really like slang, now really! Uncle Nicholas could never tolerate it."

"There you strike a chord! I desire you to speak nothing but slang if Nick objects."

Agreeable badinage had always been a favorite pastime with Jacob Stanwood. If Elizabeth had but guessed it, a taste of it was worth more to him than all the filial devotion she held in reserve.

"And now for the swap," she said. "You are not modest, I hope?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Well, then! Miss Hunniman—you remember Miss Hunniman? She used to make mama's dresses, and now she makes mine. She told me only a year ago that whenever she read about Sir Galahad or the Chevalier Bayard or Richard the Lion-hearted, she always thought of you; which was very inconvenient, because it made her mix them up, and she never could remember which of them went to the Crusades and which of them did not!"

Anything in the nature of a reminiscence was sure to jar upon Stanwood. He preferred to consider the charming young person beside him as an agreeable episode; he half resented any reminder of the permanence of their rela-

tion. Therefore, in response to this little confidence, which caused the quaint figure of Miss Hunniman to present itself with a hundred small, thronging associations of the past, he only remarked drily :

" I suppose you know that if you stay out here any length of time you will spoil your complexion."

Elizabeth was impressionable enough to feel the full significance of such hints and side-thrusts as were cautiously administered to her. She was quite aware that she and her father were totally at odds on the main point at issue, that he had as yet no intention of sharing his solitude with her for any length of time. As the days went by she perceived something else. She was not long in discovering that he was extremely poor, and she became aware in some indefinable wise that he held existence very cheap. Had her penetration been guided by a form of experience which she happily lacked, she might have suspected still another factor in the situation which had an unacknowledged influence upon Stanwood's attitude.

Meanwhile their relation continued to be a friendly one. They were, in fact, peculiarly congenial, and they could not well live together without discovering it.

They rode together, they cooked together, they set up a target, and had famous shooting-matches. Elizabeth learned to milk the cows and make butter, to saddle her bronco and mount him from the ground. They taught the pups tricks, they tamed a family of prairie-dogs, they had a plan for painting the windmill. By the end of a week Stanwood was in such good humor, that he made a marked concession.

One of the glowing, glimmering sunsets they both delighted in was going on, beautifying the prairie as warmly as the sky. Stanwood came from the shed where he had been feeding the horses, and found his visitor seated in the doorway. He stood observing her critically for a few moments. She made an attractive picture there in the warm sunset light. Before he could check himself he found himself wishing that her mother could see her. Ah! If her mother were here too, it would be almost worth while to begin life over again.

The girl, unconscious of his scrutiny, sat gazing at the view he loved. As he watched her tranquil happy face he felt reconciled and softened. Her hands lay palm downward on her lap. They were shapely hands, large and generous; a good deal tanned and freckled

now. There was something about them which he had not noticed before; and almost involuntarily his thoughts got themselves spoken.

"Do you know, Elizabeth, your *thumbs* are like your mother's!"

Elizabeth felt that it was a concession, but she had learned wisdom. She did not turn her eyes from the range, and she only said quietly, "I am glad of that, papa."

Emboldened by the consciousness of her own discretion, she ventured, later in the evening, to broach a subject fraught with risks. Having armed herself with a piece of embroidery, and placed the lamp between herself and the object of her diplomacy, she remarked in a casual manner:

"I suppose, papa, that Uncle Nicholas has told you how rich we are."

"Nick wrote me with his usual consciousness of virtue that his investments for you had turned out well."

"Our income is twice what it was ten years ago."

"I congratulate you, my dear. I only regret the moral effect upon Nick."

"And I congratulate *you*, papa. Of course it 's really yours as long as you live."

"I think you have been misinformed, my

dear. It was your mother's property, and is now yours."

"Oh, no, papa! You have a life-interest in it. I am surprised that you did not know that."

"And I am surprised that you should be, or pretend to be, ignorant that the property stands in your name. I have no more concern in it than—Miss Hunniman."

"But, papa!"

"We won't discuss the matter, if you please, my dear. We can gain nothing by discussion."

"I don't want to discuss it, papa," taking a critical survey of her embroidery; "but if you won't go snacks, I won't. Uncle Nicholas told me never to say 'go snacks,'" she added, with a side glance around the edge of the lamp-shade.

His face relaxed so far that she ventured to add: "Uncle Nicholas would be furious if we were to go snacks."

Stanwood smiled appreciatively.

"Nothing could be more painful to me than to miss an opportunity of making Nick furious," he said; "but I have not lived fifty years without having learned to immolate myself and my dearest ambitions upon the appropriate altars."

After which eloquent summing-up, he turned the conversation into another channel.

It was not long after this that Stanwood found himself experiencing a peculiar depression of spirits, which he positively refused to trace to its true source. He told himself that he wanted his freedom ; he was getting tired of Elizabeth ; he must send her home. It was nonsense for her to stay any longer, spoiling her complexion and his temper ; it was really out of the question to have this thing go on any longer. Having come to which conclusion, it annoyed him very much to find himself enjoying her society. His depression of spirits was intermittent.

One morning, when he found her sitting on the saw-horse, with the new bronco taking his breakfast from a bag she held in her lap, the sun shining full in her clear young face, health and happiness in every line of her figure, a positive thrill of fatherly pride and affection seized him. But the reaction was immediate.

He turned on his heel, disgusted at this refutation of his theories. He was wretched and uncomfortable as he had never been before, and if it was not this intruding presence that made him so, what was it ? Of course he was getting tired of her ; what could be more nat-

ural? For fifteen years he had not known the pressure of a bond. Of course it was irksome to him! He really must get rid of it.

His moodiness did not escape Elizabeth, nor did she fail to note the recent accentuating of those lines in his face, which had at first struck her painfully, but which she had gradually become accustomed to. In her own mind she concluded that her father had lived too long at this high altitude, and that she must persuade him to leave it.

"Papa," she said, as they stood for a moment in the doorway after supper, "don't you think it would be good fun to go abroad this autumn?"

His drooping spirit revived; she was getting tired of ranching.

"A capital plan, my dear. Just what you need," he replied, with more animation than he had shown since morning.

"Let us start pretty soon," she went on persuasively, deceived by his ready acquiescence.

"Us? My dear, what are you thinking of? I'm tired to death of Europe! Nothing would induce me to go."

"Oh, well. Then I don't care anything about it," she said. "We'll stay where we are, of course. I am as happy and contented as I could be anywhere."

Stanwood turned upon her with a sudden, fierce irritation.

"This is nonsense!" he cried. "You are not to bury yourself alive out here! I won't permit it! The sooner you go, *the better for both of us!*"

His voice was harsh and strained; it was the tone of it more than the words themselves that cut her to the heart. He did not want her; it had all been a miserable failure. She controlled herself with a strong effort. Her voice did not tremble; there was only the pathos of repression in it as she answered: "Very well, papa; perhaps I have had my share."

Stanwood thought, and rebelled against the thought, that he had never seen a finer thing than her manner of replying. For himself, he felt as if he had come to the dregs of life and should like to fling the cup away.

They occupied themselves that evening a good deal with the collies, and they parted early; and then it was that Stanwood was brought face to face with himself.

For half an hour or more he made a pretence of reading the papers, and looking at the pictures in a stray magazine, thus keeping himself at arm's length, as it were. But after a while even that restraint became unendurable.

He went to the back door of the house and opened it. The collies appeared in a delighted group to rush into the house. He suffered them to do so, and then, stepping out, he closed the door upon them and stood outside. There was a strong north wind, and, for a moment, its breath refreshed him like a dash of cold water. Only for a moment, however. The sense of oppression returned upon him, and he felt powerless to shake it off. With the uncertain, wavering step of a sleep-walker, he moved across to the spot where he had poured his libation three weeks ago. He stood there, strangely fascinated, glancing once or twice, furtively over his shoulder. Then, hardly knowing what he did, he got down on his knees and put his face to the ground. Was it the taste or the smell that he craved? He could not have told. He only knew that he knelt there and pressed his face to the earth, and that a sickening sense of disappointment came over him at finding all trace of it gone.

He got up from his knees, very shaky and weak, and then it was that he looked himself in the face and knew what the ignominious craving meant. He slunk into the house, cowed and shamed. The sight of the dogs, huddled about the door inside, gave him a

guilty start, and he drove them angrily out. Then he got himself to bed in the dark. He lay there in the dark, wondering foolishly what Jacob Stanwood would say if he knew what had happened ; till, suddenly, he became aware that his mind was wandering, upon which he laughed harshly. Elizabeth heard the laugh, and a vague fear seized upon her. She got up and listened at her door, but the noise was not repeated. Perhaps it was a coyote outside ; they sometimes made strange noises.

She went to the window and drew back the Persian altar-cloth. The wind came from the other side of the house ; she had been too preoccupied to notice it before. Now it shook the house rudely, and then went howling and roaring across the plains. It was strange to hear it and to feel its force, and yet to see no evidence of it : not a tree to wave its branches, not a cloud to scurry through the sky ; only the vast level prairie and the immovable hills, and up above them a sky, liquid and serene, with steady stars shining in its depths, all unconcerned with the raving wind. She felt comforted and strengthened, and when she went back to bed she rested in the sense of comfort. But she did not sleep.

She was hardly aware that she was not

sleeping, as the hours passed unmarked, until, in a sudden lull of the wind, a voice struck her ear; a voice speaking rapidly and eagerly. She sprang to her feet. The voice came from her father's room. Had some one lost his way in the night, and had her father taken him in? It did not sound like a conversation; it was monotonous, unvarying, unnatural. She hastily threw on a dressing-gown, and crept to her father's door. She recognized his voice now, but the words were incoherent. He was ill, he was delirious. There was no light within. She opened the door and whispered "Papa," but he did not hear her. In a moment she had lighted a lamp; another moment, and she stood beside him. He was sitting straight up in his bed, talking and gesticulating violently; his eyes glittered in the lamp-light, his face showed haggard and intense.

Elizabeth placed the lamp upon a stand close at hand.

"Papa," she said, "don't you know me? I 'm Elizabeth."

He caught at the name.

"You lie!" he cried shrilly. "Elizabeth's dead! I won't have her talked about! She 's dead, I say! Hush-sh! Hush-sh! Don't wake her up. Sleep 's a good thing—a good thing."

On the table where she had placed the lamp was a tiny bottle marked "chloral." There was also a glass of water upset upon the table. Stanwood's clothing and other belongings lay scattered upon the floor. She had never before seen his room disordered. Well! he was ill, and here she was to take care of him.

He was not talking so fast now, but what he said was even more incoherent. The light and the presence of another person in the room seemed to confuse and trouble him. She took his hand and felt the pulse. The hand was hot, and grasped hers convulsively. She put his coat over his shoulders, and then she sat with her arm about him, and gradually he stopped talking, and turned his face to hers with a questioning look.

"What can I do for you, papa? Tell me if there is anything I can do for you."

"Do for me?" he repeated.

"Yes, dear. Is there nothing I can do, nothing I can get for you?"

"Get for me?"

He drew off from her a little, and a crafty look, utterly foreign to the man's nature, came into the tense face.

"I don't suppose you've got a drop of whisky!" he said insinuatingly.

The sound of the word upon his own lips seemed to bring the excitement back on him. "Whisky! Yes, that's it! I don't care who knows it! Whisky! Whisky!" He fairly hissed the words.

For the first time since she came into the room Elizabeth was frightened.

"I think you ought to have a doctor," she said.

She felt him lean against her again, and she gently lowered him to the pillow. His head sank back, and he lay there with white lips and closed lids. She knelt beside him, watching his every breath. After a few minutes he opened his eyes. They were dull, but no longer wild.

"Ought you not to have a doctor, papa dear?" she asked.

Intelligence came struggling back into his face.

"No, my dear," he said, gathering himself for a strong effort. "I have had attacks like this before."

"And a stimulant is all you need?"

"All I need," he muttered. His eyes closed, and his breath came even and deep.

Elizabeth knelt there, thankful that he slept. How white his lips were! How spent he

looked! He had asked for whisky. Perhaps even in his delirium he knew what he wanted; perhaps a stimulant was all he needed. Of course it was! How stupid not to have understood!

She hurried to her room and got a small brandy-flask that had been given her for the journey. She had emptied it for a sick man on the train.

She went back to her father. He was sleeping heavily. She glanced at his watch lying upon the table beside the chloral bottle. One o'clock! She wondered whether the "store" would be open. She should hate to go to a saloon. But then, that was no matter. If her father needed a stimulant he must have it. She dressed herself quickly, and put her purse and the brandy-flask into her pocket. Then she hurried to the shed, where she saddled the bronco. Her father had once told her that she would have made a first-rate cowboy. Well, now was her chance to prove it.

The collies, who had taken refuge from the wind on the south side of the shed, came trotting in at the open door, and assembled, a curious little shadowy group, about her. But they soon dropped off to sleep, and when she led the bronco out and closed the door upon

them, a feeble wag of a tail or two was all the evidence of interest they gave.

She twisted the bridle round a post and slipped into the house for one more look at her patient. He was sleeping profoundly. She placed the lamp upon the floor in a corner, so that the bed was in shadow. Then she came back to the bedside and watched the sleeper again for a moment. She touched his forehead and found it damp and cool. The fever was past. Perhaps he was right; there was no need of a doctor—it was nothing serious. Perhaps the stuff in that little bottle had done something queer to him. A stimulant was all he needed. But he needed that, for his face was pitifully pallid and drawn.

A moment later the bronco was bearing her swiftly through the night, his hoof-falls echoing in a dull rhythm. The wind still came in gusts, blowing straight into her face, but it was warm and pleasant. When she had passed through the gate of the ranch the road went between wire fences, straight north to Cameron City. Now and then a group of horses, roused, perhaps, by her approach, stood with their heads over the fence watching her pass, while the wind stretched their manes and tails out straight to one side. She wished she could

stop and make friends with them, but there was no time for that. Her father might wake up and call for her. So on they sped, she and the bronco, waking the cattle on either side of the road, startling more than one prowling coyote, invisible to them, causing more than one prairie-dog, snug in his hole, to fancy it must be morning. And the great night, encompassing the world, gleaming in the heavens, brooding upon the earth, made itself known to her for the first time. Elizabeth never forgot that ride through the beautiful brooding night. Nature seemed larger and deeper and grander to her ever after.

As they came among the houses of the town she reined in the bronco and went quietly, lest she should wake the people. There was a light burning in the room over the store, and the window was open. A woman answered her summons. It was the wife of the storekeeper. Her husband was absent, she said, and she was up with a sick baby. She readily filled the little flask, and was sympathetic and eager to help. Should n't she send somebody over to the ranch? There was n't any doctor in Cameron City, but Cy Willows knew a heap about physic.

No. Elizabeth said her father was better

already, only he seemed in need of a stimulant. No, she did not want an escort. The night was lovely, and she would n't miss her solitary ride home for anything. She was so glad Mrs. Stiles had the whisky. It would be just what her father needed when he waked up.

And when, some hours later, Jacob Stanwood awoke, he found his daughter sitting beside him in the gray dawn.

"Why, Elizabeth!" he said, "is anything the matter? Did I disturb you?"

She leaned toward him, and laid her hand on his.

"You were ill in the night, papa, and asked for a stimulant, and I got it for you."

"A stimulant?" he repeated vaguely. "What stimulant? Where did you get it?"

"I got it at the store. It 's whisky."

"Whisky?" he cried, with a sudden, eager gleam.

Elizabeth was enchanted to find that she had done the right thing.

"Here it is, papa," she said, drawing the flask from her pocket, and pouring a little of the contents into a glass that stood ready.

He watched her with that intense, eager gleam,

"Fill it up! Fill it up!" he cried impatiently. "A drop like that is no good to a man."

He was sitting straight up again, just as she found him in the night. He reached his thin hand for the glass, which he clutched tightly. The smell of the liquor was strong in the room. His eyes were glittering with excitement.

The girl stood beside him, contemplating with affectionate delight the success of her experiment. Her utter innocence and unsuspiciousness smote him to the heart. Something stayed his hand so that he did not even lift the glass to his lips. Slowly, with his eyes fixed upon the sweet, young face, he extended his arm out over the side of the bed, the glass shaking plainly in his hold. She did not notice it; she was looking into his face which had softened strangely.

"Elizabeth," he said.

There was a sound of breaking glass, and a strong smell of liquor pouring out upon the floor.

"O papa!" she cried, distressed.

He had sunk back against the pillows, pale with exhaustion. But when she lifted the fragments of the glass, saying: "Is n't it a pity, papa?" he only answered in his usual tone,

"There 's no harm done, my dear. I don't believe it was just what I needed, after all."

He smiled with a new, indescribable sweetness and weariness.

"I think I could sleep, now," he said.

At noon Stanwood was quite himself again; himself and more, he thought, with some surprise. He would not have owned that it was a sense of victory that had put new life into his veins. Victory over a vulgar passion must partake somewhat of the vulgarity of the passion itself. No, Stanwood was not the man to glory in such a conquest. But he could, at last, glory in this daughter of his.

As she told him with sparkling eyes of her beautiful ride through the night, through the beautiful brooding night, her courage and her innocence seemed to him like a fair, beneficent miracle. But he made no comment upon her story. He only sat in the doorway, looking down the road where he had watched her approach a few weeks ago, and when she said, noting his abstraction, "A penny for your thoughts, papa!" he asked, in a purely conversational tone, "Elizabeth,"—she always loved to hear him say "Elizabeth,"—"Elizabeth, do you think it would make Nick very mad indeed if we were to go snacks?"

"Mad as hops!" she cried.

"Then let 's do it!"

Elizabeth beamed.

"And Elizabeth, there 's no place like Switzerland in summer. Let 's pack up and go!"

"Let us!" she answered, very softly, with only a little exultant tremor on the words.

She never guessed all that she had won that day; she only knew that life stretched on before her, a long, sunny pathway, where she and her father might walk together in the daily and hourly good-comradeship that she loved.

IV.

AT THE KEITH RANCH.

THE dance was in full swing—a vehement, rhythmic, dead-in-earnest ranch dance. Eight couples on the floor tramped or tiptoed, as the case might be, but always in perfect time with the two unmelodious fiddles. The tune, if tune it might be called, went over and over and over again, with the monotonous persistency of a sawmill, dominating the rhythmic tread of the dancers, but not subduing the fancy of the caller-out.

The caller-out for the moment was a curly-headed lad of twenty, with a shrewd, good-humored face. He stood in a slouching attitude, one shoulder much higher than the other, and as he gave forth, in a singsong voice, his emphatic rhymed directions, his fingers played idly with the red-silk lacings of his brown flannel shirt. To an imaginative looker-on

those idly toying fingers had an indefinable air of being very much at home with the trigger of the six-shooter at the lad's belt. So, at least, it struck Lem Keith.

"Swing him round for old Mother Flannigan!
You 've swung him so nice, now swing him again, again!
On to the next, and swing that gent!
Now straight back, and swing your own man again!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp went the rhythmic feet; diddle-diddle-dee went the fiddles. There was not much talking among either dancers or sitters-out. Occasionally one of the babies in the adjoining bedroom waked and wailed, but on the whole they were well-behaved babies. There they lay on the bed, six in a row, while their mothers eagerly snatched their bit of pleasure at the cost of a night's sleep.

Lemuel Keith, joint host with his brother on this occasion, sat on a bench against the wall, contemplating with wonder the energy of these overworked women. Beside him sat the husband of one of them, a tall, gaunt ranchman, with his legs crossed, poising upon a bony knee an atom of humanity in a short plaided woollen frock.

"How old is your baby?" asked Lem, mindful of his duties as host.

"Four months," was the laconic reply; and as though embarrassed by the personal nature of the inquiry, the man rose and repaired to a remote corner, where he began a solemn waltz with his offspring in his arms.

It was an April evening, and the windows were open to the south. A cool night-breeze came in, grateful alike to dancers and lookers-on. Lem sat watching his twin brother Joe, who was taking his turn at the dance. Lem usually watched Joe when he had the chance; for if the brothers were bewilderingly alike in appearance, they were animated by a spirit so unlike, that Joe's every look and action was a source of interest to Lem. Indeed, it was his taste for Joe's society that had made a Colorado ranchman of him. Nature had intended Lemuel Keith for a student, and then, by a strange oversight, had made him the twin-brother of a fascinating daredevil for whom the East was too narrow.

Lem sat and watched Joe, and observed the progress of the dance, philosophizing over the scene in a way peculiar to himself. For his own part, he never danced if he could help himself, but he found the dancing human being a fruitful subject of contemplation. Joe's partner, in particular, amused and interested

him. She was a rather dressy young person, with a rose-leaf complexion and a simpering mouth. Rose-leaf complexions are rare on the sun-drenched, wind-swept prairies, and the more effective for that. The possessor of this one, fully aware of her advantage, was displaying, for her partner's delectation, the most wonderful airs and graces. She glided about upon the points of her toes; she gave him her delicately poised finger-tips with a birdlike coyness which the glance of her beady black eyes belied. Joe was in his element, playing the bold yet insinuating cavalier.

Lem Keith found a fascination in this first ranch dance of his. He liked the heartiness of the whole performance; he enjoyed the sharp-cut individuality of the people, their eccentricities of costume and deportment; he was of too sensitive a fibre not to feel the dramatic possibilities of the occasion. "Tenderfoot" as he was, the fact could not escape him that a man in a flannel shirt, with a pistol at his belt, —and most of the men were thus equipped,— was more than likely to have a touch of lawlessness about him.

There was a pause between the two figures of the dance. Joe had taken his partner's fan, which he was gently waving to and fro before

her face. She stood panting with affected exhaustion, glancing archly at her new "young man" from under studiously fluttering eyelids. The gaunt father, having stopped waltzing, had discovered that the woollen-clad baby was fast asleep on his shoulder. Over in another corner, under a window, was a red-faced cowboy, slumbering as tranquilly as the baby, his head sunk on his breast, a genial forelock waving lightly in the breeze. The fiddlers resumed their function. "Swing your pards!" cried the curly-headed boy; and once more all was commotion.

The room seemed hot and crowded. Lem had shifted his position, and was standing opposite the windows. He looked toward them, and his glance was arrested. In the square of light cast outside by the lamps within was a sinister, malignant face. It was the face of a man whom the Keith boys had seen tonight for the first time. He had paid his seventy-five cents, and had received his numbered ticket like the others, by which simple ceremony all the requirements of ranch etiquette were fulfilled. Bub Quinn they called him—Bub Quinn from the Divide. Rather a nice-looking fellow, the brothers had agreed, attracted by his brilliant smile and hearty

hand-shake. It was Bub Quinn who had brought the girl that Joe was dancing with, and now that Lem came to think of it, he could not remember having seen her dance with any one else, besides Quinn himself. Lem's heart gave a heavy thump almost before his brain had grasped the situation. Yet the situation was very plain. It was Joe and his little fool of a partner that those malignant eyes were following.

They were light eyes, looking out from under level light eyebrows, and Lem frankly quaked at sight of them. The man's face was clean-shaven, showing high cheek-bones and a firm, handsome mouth. He stood in an indolent attitude, with his hands in his pockets ; but all the reckless passion of the desperado was concentrated in the level glance of those menacing eyes.

"Meet your partner with a double *sashay*," cried the curly-headed boy. Diddle-diddle-dee squeaked the fiddles. Lem looked again at his brother. He was flirting outrageously.

A door opened behind Lem, and a woman called him by name. He stepped into the kitchen, where two of his prairie neighbors were busy with the supper. It was Mrs. Luella Jenkins who had summoned him, kind,

queer, warm-hearted Mrs. Luella. The "Keith boys" were giving their first dance, and she had undertaken to engineer the supper.

"We 've got the coffee on," she remarked, pointing over her shoulder at a couple of gallon-cans on the stove, from which an agreeable aroma was rising.

"That 's first-rate," said Lem, who had a much more distinct vision of Bub Quinn's eyes than of the mammoth tin cans. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Well, I dunno," Mrs. Luella ruminated. Her speech was as slow as her movements were quick. "I was thinkin' 't was 'most a pity you had n't had bun sandwiches." She looked regretfully at the rapidly growing pile of the ordinary kind with which the table was being loaded. "The buns taste kind o' sweet and pleasant, mixed up with the ham."

Through the closed door came the scraping of the indefatigable fiddles. "Hold her tight, and run her down the middle!" shouted the voice of the caller-out.

"Over to Watts's last fall," Mrs. Luella rambled on, slicing ham the while at a great rate, "they had bun sandwiches, and in the top of ary bun there was a toothpick stickin'

up. If you 've got toothpicks enough about the place, we might try it. It looks real tasty."

"Mrs. Jenkins," Lem broke in, "do you know Bub Quinn?"

"No; nor I don't want to," Luella answered curtly.

"Why not?"

"He 's too handy with his shooting-irons to suit my taste."

Then, resuming the thread of her discourse: "You don't think, now, you 've got toothpicks enough? They 'd set things off real nice." But Lem had departed.

"I s'pose he 's kind o' flustered with givin' their first dance," she said apologetically to her coadjutor among the sandwiches.

Lem was a great favorite with Mrs. Luella. She liked him better than she did Joe. She was one of the few people who could, at a glance, tell the two brothers apart. She always spoke of Lem as the "little chap," though he was in fact precisely of a height with his brother; and she gave as the reason for the preference, that "the little chap was n't a ramper." Unfortunately for Lem, perhaps, she was right. He was not a ramper.

As Lem stepped out into the other room, the

caller-out was shouting, "Promen-*ade* all—you know where!" The sets were breaking up, and Joe with his best manner was leading his partner to a seat. The face had vanished from the window. Bub Quinn was striding across the room, and now planted himself in front of the recreant pair.

"You 're to come with me, Aggy," he growled.

"Pray don't mention it!" cried Joe, relinquishing the girl to Quinn with a mocking reverence.

Shrugging her shoulders, and pouting, Aggy moved away with her captor; not, however, without a parting glance over her shoulder at Joe. The two brothers met at the kitchen-door.

"I say, Joe," Lem begged, "don't dance with that girl again."

"And why not!"

"You would n't ask why not if you had seen that ruffian's face at the window."

"Did n't I see it, though?" scoffed Joe, in high spirits, and Lem knew that he had blundered.

A new caller-out had taken the floor, and was shouting, "Seventeen to twenty-four, get on the floor and dance!"

The pauses are short at a ranch dance, for

each man, having a right in only one dance out of three or four, is eager for his turn. The women on this particular occasion might have been glad of a rest, for there were only ten of them to satisfy the demands of all the men, and steady dancing from eight o'clock to three is no light task. Nevertheless, each one rose with sufficient alacrity in response to the polite inquiry, "Will you assist me with this dance?" and in a few minutes the same many-colored woollen gowns, and much befrizzled heads, which had diversified the last sets, were lending lustre to the present dance.

Neither Bub Quinn nor Joe Keith was included this time among those admonished to "get on the floor and dance," and Lem, thankful for the respite, stepped out on the piazza, where a group of men were lounging and smoking. The air outside was sharp and invigorating; the moon was full, and in its cold, clear light the Peak glimmered white and ghostly.

Lem strolled off the piazza, and over to the group of sorry-looking broncos, in saddle or harness, standing hitched to the fence. He pushed in among them, patting their heads, or righting the blankets of the few that were fortunate enough to have such luxuries. He

felt as though he should like to enter into confidential relations with them. They seemed, somehow, more of his own kind than the rough, jostling, pugnacious beings passing themselves off as men and brothers within there. He poked about from one to the other of the sturdy, plush-coated little beasts, till he came to a great white plow-horse harnessed to a sulky, and looking like a giant in contrast with the scrubby broncos. The amiability which is supposed to wait upon generous proportions proved to be a characteristic of this equine Goliath, for at Lem's approach he cocked his ears and turned his head with marked friendliness. Lem looked across the creature's rough neck to the firm, strong outlines of "the range," showing clearly in the moonlight; he drew his lungs full of the keen, thin air. But neither "the strength of the hills," nor the elixir of the air, could restore his equanimity. He could not throw off the weight that oppressed him. There was no shirking the truth. He was deadly afraid of Bub Quinn; the sight of that lowering face at the window had caused in him a horrible physical shrinking; the dread of an undefined mischief brewing weighed upon his spirit like a nightmare.

"Great heavens! What a coward I am!" he groaned aloud."

The white horse rubbed his velvet nose in mute sympathy against the young man's shoulder; but there was no solace that the white horse could give. Lem leaned against the friendly neck, and shut his teeth hard together. A lifelong chagrin welled up in him, flooding his soul with bitterness.

If Lemuel Keith had not adored his brother, he would have hated him—hated him for possessing that one quality of rash courage beside which every other virtue seemed mean and worthless.

Presently he found himself looking in at the window again. Joe had disappeared from the scene. Bub Quinn and his Aggy were sitting side by side in stony silence. The fiddles had fallen into a more sentimental strain; hints of "The Mocking Bird" might be heard struggling for utterance in the strings. In this ambitious attempt the pitch would get lower and lower, and then recover itself with a queer falsetto effect. Charley Leroy, the crack "bronco-buster" of the region, was caller-out this time. He was less inventive than the curly-headed boy, but he gave out his commands in the same chanting measure, and the tramp,

tramp of the feet was as rhythmic as ever. The curly-headed boy was having his turn at the dance, "assisted" by a sallow, middle-aged woman in a brown woollen dress, who made frequent dashes into the adjoining room to quiet her baby. Lem noticed that the hands of the curly-headed boy were so tanned that the finger-nails showed white by contrast. He also observed that Aggy's neck was as pink as her cheeks, which had not been the case half an hour before. In his effort not to look at Bub Quinn, Lem's attention had become vague and scattered. He fixed his eyes upon an elderly man of an anxious countenance, with a shock of tow-colored hair sticking straight out in all directions. The man was having some difficulty in steering his partner through an intricate figure; he was the only person on the floor who did not keep step, and his movements became at every moment more vague and undecided. When, at last, the wiry, determined-looking "bronco-buster" sprang upon the company the somewhat abstruse direction:

"Lady round the gent, and the gent don't go;
Lady round the lady, and the gent so-*lo!*"

the "gent" in question became hopelessly bewildered, and stood stock still in the middle

of the floor. By the time the set was disentangled, the dance seemed to be over, and the "bronco-buster" dismissed the dancers with the cynical prophecy, "You 'll all get married on a *stor-my day!*"

At this juncture, midnight being well passed, supper was announced. The kitchen door swung open, and the fragrant smell of the coffee took possession of the room, and floated out through the open window. As some one closed the window in his face, Lem followed the other loungers into the house. The men had all made a stampede for the kitchen; the women sat on chairs and benches against the wall, some of them leaning their heads back wearily, while others fanned themselves and their neighbors with vigor, not relaxing for a moment the somewhat strained vivacity which they felt that the occasion demanded. Bub Quinn's Aggy—no one knew her last name—sat a little apart from the others. She was apparently absorbed in the contemplation of her pocket-handkerchief, a piece of coarse finery, which she held by the exact middle, flirting it across her face in lieu of the fan, which had slid to the floor.

Lem paused on his way to the kitchen, and observed her closely. He saw the pink of her

neck take on a deeper tinge, and at the same moment Bub Quinn and Joe brushed past him and stood before the girl, each offering her a plate on which reposed two sandwiches and a section of cucumber pickle.

This was Aggy's opportunity. She shrugged her shoulders, which were encased in red velveteen; she lifted and then dropped her eyes, poising her head first on one side and then on the other; she clasped her hands and wrinkled her forehead. Lem felt as though he were watching the capricious sparks which mark the progress of a slow match toward a powder-train. Bub Quinn, meanwhile, stood rooted before the girl, while Joe, having possessed himself of the fallen fan, met her coquetry with blandishments of the most undisguised nature. At length, hesitatingly, deprecatingly, she took Quinn's plate, but at the same time she moved along on the bench and offered Joe a seat. He promptly took it, and Quinn went away with the calmness of a silently gathering thunder-cloud.

Quinn did not dance again that night; he withdrew to the piazza, where he kept guard at the window hour after hour. Joe danced with no one but Aggy, and sat beside her between whiles. Lem wandered about, trying not to watch Quinn. He knew his brother too well to

remonstrate with him again by so much as a look.

As the night wore on, the hilarity of the company increased, nothing daunted by the sight of a man lying here and there under a bench with a telltale black bottle protruding from his pocket. When the favorite figure of the "Bird in the Cage" was danced, and the caller-out shouted, "Bird flies out, and the crow flies in," everybody in the room cried "Caw! caw!" in excellent imitation of the sable-hued fowl thereby typified, and the dancers, conscious of an admiring public, "swung" and "sashayed" with increased vehemence. Toward three o'clock Joe was again dancing with Quinn's Aggy, and as the caller-out chanted:

> "Swing that girl, that *pretty* little girl,
> That *girl* you left *behind you!*"

he advanced toward her with an air of mock gallantry. At the same moment Bub Quinn stalked into the middle of the set, a sombrero planted firmly on his head, a long cowhide whip in his hand. He seized Aggy by the arm with a grip that must have hurt her, and said, "I'm going home now; you can do as you d—— please." A pistol-shot could not

have made half the sensation caused by this breach of etiquette; indeed, it would not have been half so unprecedented. Aggy turned with a startled defiance, but at sight of Quinn's face she recoiled.

"I 'm all ready to go," she said sullenly; and too thoroughly cowed to cast even a parting glance at Joe, she hurried away to get ready for her twenty-mile drive. Joe, meanwhile, with perfect composure, provided himself with another partner, and the dance went on. And so the thunder-cloud had withdrawn, and the bolt had not fallen.

It was not until the gray dawn was in the sky that the last of the revellers drove through the cow-yard, and out across the prairie to meet the rising sun.

By the time a second dawn had come the daily routine at the Keith ranch was running in its accustomed grooves. The cows had already been milked, yesterday's butter already packed for shipment, and Joe, surrounded by bustling men and barking dogs, was attending to the departure of the milk-carts for the town. The Keith brothers had a young but thriving dairy-trade, and Joe was a great success in his character of "boss."

In a field bordering upon the highway, a mile away from the ranch-house, Lem Keith was plowing. There was something about this pastoral labor which was peculiarly congenial to Lem ; perhaps because he did it well. Not one of the ranch "hands" could guide the plow with such precision through the loose prairie soil. Certainly, very few of them would have taken the trouble to set up a stake at the end of the furrow with a flying bit of red flannel to steer by. Lem had the habit of plowing with his eyes fixed upon the stake, his shoulders slightly stooping. Yet the sense of what was going on in the sky and on the prairie was never lost. To-day the sun rose as clear as a bell, flooding the fields with gold. Lem was plowing from east to west, a quarter-mile furrow. Whether he faced the mountains, answering the sunrise with a crimson glow, or the yellow prairie sea, with bold buttes standing out upon it like rock-bound islands, he could not go amiss. His eye met nothing, his thoughts touched upon nothing, which could jar upon his peaceful mood. The horses plodded steadily on with hanging heads ; the plow responded like a live thing to his guidance ; he knew that the long narrow furrow he was leaving behind him was as straight as

the wake of a boat in still water. After all, ranch life was a fine thing. A man must be the better for breathing such air ; a man must be the wiser for living so close to good old Mother Earth ; a man must be—hark ! Was that Joe's pony galloping across the field ? Lem turned. No ; the pony was a strange one. And the rider ?

Bub Quinn had leaped to the ground not ten feet from him. He had flung the rein over the neck of his steaming bronco ; but he himself was as calm and as cool as though he had not ridden twenty miles before sunrise at a break-neck gallop.

"I 've come to settle accounts with you, mister," Quinn remarked in a drawling voice.

If the fellow had raged and cursed, if he had seemed to be in a passion, if his fists had been clenched, or the muscles of his face set, it would not have been so appalling. But this deadly composure, the careless indifference with which he held his pistol in his right hand, while his left hung loosely at his side, was more than terrifying ; it was fairly blood-curdling.

Lem's hands had let the reins drop, and the horses had gone plodding on, the plow lurching and swaying at their heels.

For an instant Lem's brain whirled.

Swing that girl, that *pretty* little girl,
That *girl* you left *behind you !*

His brain seemed to be whirling to the tune of that jingle.

"If you 've got anything to say," drawled Quinn, fingering the trigger, the pistol pointed at Lem's forehead—"if you 've got anything to say, now's your chance. Sorry I can't allow you time to make a will," he added facetiously, "but I 've got to get back to my work."

Lem's brain was clear now. There were no more jingles in it. Nothing was there but an overwhelming conviction that, if the man did not shoot quickly, Joe might arrive, and show Quinn his mistake. That must not be. Joe was too fine a fellow to end like this—like this !

Lem Keith was shuddering from head to foot, and his lips were stiff and blue, yet there was an odd, masterful ring in his voice as he cried, "Make haste, will you, and shoot !"

A shot rang out, and Lem fell, pierced, not by Bub Quinn's bullet, but by the living horror of death. On the furrows beside him Bub Quinn lay stretched, with blood oozing from his right shoulder.

That shot of Joe Keith's, as his pony tore

across the plowed field, was long talked of on the prairie. The echo was still ringing in his ears when he sprang to the ground, and knelt beside his brother, searching for a wound. He could find none. He pressed his hand to Lem's heart; his own pulse was pounding so that he could feel no other motion. He lifted his brother's head and laid it against his own breast; he loosened his shirt and chafed his hands. The sun shone straight into the white face, and the eyelids moved.

"Lem! Dear old pal! Speak! Do speak!"

Lem's consciousness returned slowly, reluctantly; but he knew his brother's voice.

"Joe!" he muttered; "Joe!"

He made an effort to look about him; and first his eyes followed vaguely the wanderings of Quinn's bronco, which had strayed far afield, and he strove feebly to account for the pang that the sight gave him. Suddenly his consciousness adjusted itself, as a lock falls into place. He turned his eyes on Quinn, lying where he had fallen, the blood still flowing from his wound; and then he knew that he himself had only swooned.

He sat upright, clasping his knees with his two hands, and Joe stood over him, tenderly brushing the earth from his shoulder. At last

Lem spoke, while a dark flush mounted slowly up into his temples.

"Joe!" he said, "I 'm not hurt. You may as well despise me. I *am* a coward."

A look went across Joe's face, half-assenting, half-indulgent.

"Never mind, old boy," he said, with patronizing good-will; "we can't all be cut after the same pattern."

He extended his hand to help his brother to his feet. A movement caused him to turn. Quinn had gathered strength to speak. He was leaning on his left elbow, staring at the two brothers. His face was ghastly, but his voice had lost none of its drawling scorn as he said to Joe, slowly and distinctly, "You in-fernal idiot!"

Then a great light broke in upon Joe Keith's mind, and he knew the truth.

V.

THE RUMPETY CASE.

WHEN Sandoria is snowbound it is not so very much quieter, even in its outer aspect, than at any other time; for the monotony of snow is no more complete than the monotony of yellow-gray prairie. Even when, at rare intervals, the snow covers the fences, it is no characteristic landmark which is thus obliterated; no picturesque rustic bars are thus lost to the landscape, no irregular and venerable stone walls. At the best a prairie fence offers nothing more distinctive to the view than a succession of scrawny upright stakes connected by wires invisible at a few rods' distance.

One feature Sandoria boasts, to be sure, which lends a certain distinction to the landscape at every season: namely, a long line of cottonwood-trees following the course of a half-hearted stream known as "the creek." The

water-supply is but a grudging one, yet it has proved sufficient not only to induce the growth of cottonwoods, but to raise the tiny collection of houses known as Sandoria to the rank and dignity of a county-seat. For who could doubt the future growth and prosperity of a prairie town rejoicing in the unique advantage of a watercourse?

There is, however, in the modern scheme of things, one agent more potent than running water, and that is the arbitrary, omnipotent, indispensable railroad; and the railroad in its erratic course saw fit to give the cold shoulder to the ambitious little county-seat, left it ten miles to the eastward, and then went zigzagging up to Denver with a conscience as dead as that of the corporation whose creature it was.

Sandoria, unable to retaliate, took its reverses philosophically, and straightway fell into a profound slumber, from which it is thoroughly aroused but once a year. Once a year, in the depth of winter, the much-injured county-seat asserts its rightful dignity; for once a year the court convenes within its borders, and then the whole county becomes a meek tributary to its proper head. With indisputable authority the citizens of the two up-

start railroad towns are summoned as jurors; ranchman and cowboy from all the country-side make daily trips in the service of the law to the neglected little county-seat, leaving, as is but just, many a ponderous silver dollar in "sample-room" or "store." At such times the visitors admit that Sandoria is a snug little place, and the new frame court-house a credit to the county, only why did they build a town where you can't see the mountains? Then the Sandorians reply that from the slight elevation west of the town there is a view of the Peak itself,—neither critic nor apologist taking into consideration how rarely men and women ascend their little hills to contemplate the wider glories of life.

To-day the court was sitting, and the town rejoiced. Every man, woman, and child felt the pleasing exhilaration of knowing that something was going forward. The square two-story false fronts of the peak-roofed buildings looked with one-eyed approval upon the thronging men and women, horses and dogs, enlivening the single street of the town. A fervent sun shone gratefully upon the loungers in front of the court-house, where the snow was trodden to the solid consistency of a pavement. The noon recess was nearly over, and

all were waiting for the judge and his galaxy of legal lights.

Ed Rankin, a young ranchman from over beyond Emmaville, finding himself among strangers, and being as shy as a coyote, turned in at the court-house door, and was making his way toward the big air-tight stove, when he observed that the room was not empty, as he supposed it would be. In a remote corner sat a sorry-looking group, a woman and three children, their shrinking figures thinly clad, their eyes, red with crying or exposure, glancing apprehensively from side to side. The youngest of the group was a boy of ten; he, like all the others, had the look of a hunted creature.

Rankin walked across the room, his footsteps muffled by the sawdust with which the floor was plentifully strewn. Yet, soft as his tread was, the four shivering creatures were visibly startled by it. The young ranchman passed within "the bar" and stood with his back to the stove. He tried to whistle, but he could not do it. He looked about the room, seeking some object to divert his thoughts. Bare walls and rows of empty benches outside the bar; within that mystic boundary all the usual furnishings of the immediate precincts of justice.

Three days' steadfast contemplation of these humble stage-properties had pretty well exhausted their interest, and Rankin's attention again wandered to the group in the corner. The more the dry scorching heat of the stove penetrated his own person the colder the woman and children looked. At last he blurted out, in the manner peculiar to him when suffering from embarrassment, "Say, ma'am, why don't you come and get warm?"

The woman started and looked over her shoulder before she answered.

"I guess we 'd rather stay where we are," she said.

Incapable of withstanding such a rebuff, Rankin slouched across the room and stood in the open door-way. A three-seated ranch-wagon, drawn by a pair of ill-matched but brisk little broncos, was just coming along the street. The heavy wheels creaked and groaned over the snow, and then stopped before the court-house. The whole "court," which was sojourning with a well-to-do ranchman a couple of miles out of town, had arrived, plentifully wrapped up in mufflers of every color of the rainbow. As judge and lawyers descended before the temple of justice, it was curious to observe how, in spite of bemufflered heads and

crimson noses, these representatives of a different civilization contrasted with the prairie people. There was the grave, keen-eyed judge, of humane and dignified bearing; there was the district attorney, shrewd and alert, a rising man; and there were lawyers from the city of Springtown: all this ability and training placed at the service of the remote little prairie community.

"What 's on this afternoon, judge?" asked Merriam the store-keeper, with the well-bred familiarity of a prominent citizen.

"The Rumpety case, I believe."

"Not much good, I suppose."

"I 'm afraid not," said the judge, glancing as he passed at the shivering woman and children. "I wonder if they have had any dinner," he queried, with sudden solicitude.

"Yes. My wife looked after that. She took 'em over a mess of stuff. They looked scared of their lives to eat it, but it 's safe inside of 'em now." And the kind, red-faced store-keeper hugged himself visibly at the thought.

The court assembled.

Within the bar a group of chairs had already been taken possession of by the dames and belles of Sandoria and the neighboring ranches, to whom court-week is the equivalent of carni-

val, opera, or races in more favored regions; and where, indeed, could a more striking drama be presented for their delectation than here, where friends and neighbors played the leading parts?

The court assembled; lawyers and stenographer took their places; the clerk stood in readiness; the judge mounted the bench; and lo! the historic dignity of a court of justice had descended upon that rude stage, and all was ready for whatever comedy or tragedy might be to enact upon it.

The judge, referring to the list, announced that the next case would be "The people of the State of Colorado against Dennis Rumpety." Then, being called, Dennis Rumpety walked down the court-room and passed within the bar.

The man looked fifty or thereabouts; a short, thick-set figure, with a large head covered with thick iron-gray hair. The smooth-shaven face was a peculiar one, being broad in its outline, with the features, especially the eyes, small and close together. The short, bushy eyebrows met above a fine, clean-cut nose; the jaws were heavy and brutal; yet the menace of the face was not in these, but in the thin straight lips which closed like the shears of Fate. A cruel smile gathered

about the lips as he answered the questions of the court. There was something peculiarly incongruous in the jovial, happy-go-lucky name to which this man answered.

"Mr. Rumpety," the judge asked, "have you provided yourself with legal advice?"

"No, your honor," the man replied, with a strong north-country brogue. "No, sorr! I 've got no use for the laryers."

"You are prepared, then, to argue your own case?"

"I lave me case in the hands of me fahmily. Their testimony will clear me from the false accusations of me innimies. If thim as——"

"That will do, Mr. Rumpety."

"If thim as are——"

"Mr. Rumpety, that will do."

The judge invariably spoke in a low tone of voice, but it was not often that he had to repeat himself; the voice of authority has a way of making itself heard.

Rumpety locked his lips again and took his seat. The jury was called, Ed Rankin's name among the first.

Rankin had not heard a word about the Rumpety case, yet the nature of it was as clear to him as daylight. This brute was up for cruelty to those four shivering creatures on the

bench in the corner, and they would never dare testify against their persecutor. In all those abject countenances there was not one ray of courage visible.

Now began the process of weeding out the jury, which, when it came his turn, Rumpety performed with a free hand. The prosecution having dismissed some half-dozen men and "passed" the jury, the defendant began his inquisition. He asked no unnecessary questions, gave no reasons for his prejudices, but with unalterable decision declared, "I won't have that man on the jury at all!" or, "I don't want him: he may go."

Rankin was among the first to be thus summarily rejected, and he joined the crowd outside the bar, only half contented with his release. He would have liked "to convict that beast."

It was not much of a compliment to be retained on Rumpety's jury. As often as, in his cursory examination, he came upon an ignorant or brutish face, a complacent smile played about the thin lips, and he said, "That man 'll do. He 'll do."

And now the trial began. People from the town of Wolverton testified that the boy Victor—poor little defeated Victor!—had appeared

in the street fleeing from his home, four miles away, crying that his father was going to kill him. The child's ear had been frightfully bruised and swollen, and there were unmistakable marks of ill usage upon him. The man Rumpety's barbarity was notorious on all the countryside, and this was the third successive year he had been up before the court. It had never been possible to secure a conviction, owing to the dogged persistence of his victims in perjuring themselves in his favor.

As one after another of the trembling family shuffled up to the witness-seat and swore, with hanging head and furtive eyes, that Dennis Rumpety was a kind husband and father, who never punished them "more than was just," this model parent sat with gleaming eyes and an evil smirk, resting his case upon the "testimony of his fahmily." If, occasionally, the witness hesitated, Rumpety would lift his eyebrows or make a slight movement which sent the blood into the pale cheek of woman or child and an added tremor into the faint voice. More than once the district attorney sprang to his feet and cried, "Your honor, I object to this man's intimidating the people's witnesses;" but the intimidation was too subtle to seize hold upon.

Ed Rankin wondered what would happen if somebody should hit the wretch a whack over the head every time he raised an eyebrow. Somehow it struck him that the law was hardly equal to tackling "that kind."

The cross-examination brought out no new evidence.

The district attorney was especially persistent with the boy, the immediate victim in this instance.

"Victor," he said, "state to the jury why you accused your father of abusing you and wanting to kill you, if it was n't true."

The boy hesitated.

"Don't be afraid to speak the truth. He sha'n't hurt you."

But the boy knew better.

"Sure I lied," he said.

"And what did you lie for?"

"Because I was mad."

"But what made you get mad with such a kind father?"

"Because he came into the cellar and found fault wid me about the potatoes."

"Had he reason to find fault with you?"

The boy looked at his father: one look was enough.

"Yes, sorr. I had an ugly fit on."

Poor little shrinking shivering wretch, with his cowed figure and trembling lips! It is safe to say that an "ugly fit" seized upon every person listening to that futile confession.

Ed Rankin felt the blood boil in his veins. He glanced at Myra Beckwith, sitting among the audience within the bar. She was leaning forward with her hands clasped tightly, watching the boy. There were tears in her eyes, and Rankin blessed her for them.

It was clear that the district attorney himself was a good deal wrought upon, for his manner grew quieter every minute. He sat with his head slightly forward, looking out from under his brows straight into the miserable little face before him. His questions came short and incisive.

"State to the jury again how you hurt your ear."

"Sure I fell off a horse."

"Hm! You fell off a horse and lit on your ear?"

"Yes, sorr."

"And this ingenious tumble took place before the racket in the cellar?"

"Yes, sorr."

"How long before?"

"I guess about a week."

"Your mother testified that it happened the same morning."

"Yes, sorr. It was the same marning."

The poor little chap's answers were getting almost inaudible. He looked spent with misery and apprehension. He gave no sign of tears. His wan, pinched little face looked as if he had cried so much in his short life that there was no longer any relief in it. He was soon dismissed, and went shuffling back to his cold corner.

The woman and girls proved no more available for purposes of justice than the boy. Their testimony was perfectly consistent and absolutely unshakable; it had been thoroughly beaten into them, that was clear.

When it came time for Rumpety to plead his own cause before the jury he proved quite equal to the situation. He planted himself before them and harangued them like any third-rate criminal lawyer.

"I tell you, gen'lemen," he declared, "it's no small b'y's job to keep that fahmily in arder!" and he proceeded to describe them as a cantankerous lot, to be ruled only by that ideal justice tempered by mercy which he was apparently a master in dispensing.

At the last he waxed pathetic, and, in a tear-

ful voice, somewhat at odds with his dry, wicked little eyes, he cried, "I 've got a row to hoe, that if there was a lot of men in it they 'd have hanged themselves from a rafter!"

With which magnificent climax and a profound bow and flourish, he took his seat, and assumed a pose of invulnerable righteousness from which no invectives nor innuendoes of the prosecuting attorney could move him. He had rested his case on the testimony of his "fahmily," and he knew his jury too well to have much anxiety about their verdict.

The lamps had been lighted long ago, and the early winter evening had set in. The court took a recess, waiting the verdict of the jury. This was the last case on the trial docket for that day.

Rumpety was standing, broad and unblushing, before the stove, whither, in obedience to his commands, his wife and children had also repaired. With true prairie courtesy the men had placed chairs for the Rumpety "fahmily," and an unsuccessful attempt was made to converse with them on indifferent topics.

Rumpety stood, plainly gloating over his victims, the queer gleam in his eyes growing more intense every minute.

Mrs. Rumpety did not share her husband's

confidence in the issue. Once, when the judge spoke a kind word to her, she muttered, "Ach, your honor! don't let 'em put the costs on us! Don't let 'em put the costs on us!" and Rankin, standing by, realized with a pang that even this misery could be increased.

The situation was oppressive. Rankin sauntered out of the room and out of the court-house, closing the door behind him. The air was intensely cold; the stars glittered sharply. He liked it outside; he felt the same relief and exhilaration which he had experienced when he first took possession of his "claim," three years before, and felt himself lord over the barren sweep of prairie. There had been hardship in it; the homely comforts of his father's little down-east farm were lacking,—but it was freedom. Freedom! It used to seem to Rankin, before he knew Myra Beckwith, that freedom was all he wanted in life. This shy, awkward, long-limbed fellow had desired nothing so much as room enough, and he had wrested it from Fate.

He wondered, as he stood out under the stars, why Mrs. Rumpety and her children did not run away. The world was big enough and to spare. They would probably starve, to be sure; but starvation was infinitely better than bondage.

The door at his elbow closed sharply, and a voice cried,—

"Hullo, Rank! did you know that those blamed idiots had acquitted him?"

"I knew they would." Rankin answered, with a jerk which betokened suppressed emotion.

"There's nothing left now but lynching," his friend continued. It was Ray Dolliber, one of the more reckless spirits.

Rankin grunted in a non-committal manner.

"Say, Rank, would you lend a hand?"

"I guess not," Rankin replied slowly, as if deliberating the question.

"Why not?"

"I never did believe in lynching."

"What's the matter with lynching?"

"'T ain't fair play. Masked men, and a lot of 'em, onto one feller."

Dolliber waxed sarcastic.

"P'raps you think it's fair play for a great brute of a man to bully a woman and six children."

"P'raps I do," said Rankin, still deliberating, "but I guess 't ain't likely."

Another man came out of the court-house, leaving the door open behind him. They could see Rumpety pulling on a thick overcoat

and winding his ears and throat in a heavy muffler. "Come along," he swaggered, with a flourish of the arms; and woman and children, unencumbered by other wraps than those they had worn all day, followed abjectly and made their way after him to the shed where the team was tied.

"I say, Dolliber, did they say it was fourteen miles to their ranch?"

"Yes."

"South, was n't it?"

"Yes."

"They 'll have the wind in their faces."

"You bet!"

A few minutes later the Rumpety wagon went creaking and groaning past the court-house.

Ed Rankin stepped inside and got his leather jacket and woollen muffler. He met the jury straggling out with the crestfallen air of men conscious of an inglorious performance. The judge and the district attorney stood just within the door, waiting for the ranch-wagon.

"They say," said the district attorney, "that Rumpety never does a stroke of work."

"Saves up his strength for bullying his family," the judge rejoined. "He takes good care of himself. Did you see how warmly he was dressed?"

"Yes, curse him!"

"It would be a mercy if the others were to freeze to death on the way home."

"Seems likely enough, too; but it would be rather hard on the three little brats waiting at the ranch for their mother."

Rankin, meanwhile, had got himself equipped for his long ride.

There was to be a dance in the court-house that evening, and some men were sweeping the sawdust into a corner and setting the benches against the wall.

"Ain't you goin' to stay for the dance, Ed?" one of them asked. "The girls are all coming."

Rankin felt himself blush ignominiously.

"No," he growled. "I've got some work to do to-night."

"What, at the ranch?"

Rankin paused to take account with his conscience. Being a down-easter, he liked to keep on good terms with that monitor. But conscience had no fault to find as he presently answered, "Yes, at the ranch."

He strode out of the court-house with a tread very different from his usual slouching gait. Out in the shed he found his bronco sniffing ruefully at an empty dinner-bag. But

she whinnied pleasantly at his approach. Five minutes later horse and rider were off at a swinging pace, headed, not for their own ranch, which lay twelve miles to the northward. Straight in the teeth of the wind they travelled; in the teeth of the south wind, that stung their faces like a whip-lash.

Before very long they sighted the Rumpety wagon showing plainly against the snow in the starlight. The road went most of the way down-hill, and wagon and bronco made good speed. The air grew colder every minute.

"About ten below, should n't you say, Pincher?"

Pincher tossed her tousled mane affirmatively.

They kept about forty yards behind the team, which went at a steady rate.

"I say, Pincher, the old beast must be laying it onto them horses, to make 'em go like that."

This time Pincher merely laid an ear back in token of sympathy.

"We 'll give him a worse trouncing than that, though. Eh, Pincher?"

And Rankin fumbled with cold fingers at the whip-handle in his pocket. The reins lay across Pincher's neck. Rankin did not want his hands to get too cold "for business."

On and on they pounded through the snow; colder and colder it grew. There was a shiver in the stars themselves, and only the snow looked warm.

"If I was n't so all-fired mad, Pincher, I believe 't would seem kind o' cold."

At these words Pincher took a spurt and had to be held in, lest they should overtake the wagon.

They had crossed the railroad, leaving Wolverton with its handful of twinkling lights to the eastward, and now a line of the Peak was gleaming, a narrow white crescent, above the long, low rise of ground to the west. Once they passed a depression through which the great dome of snow towered in all its grandeur; but that was only for a moment. Rankin's heart beat high at sight of it.

"There 's a way out of 'most every place," he muttered, below his breath.

The last three miles of the way the cold had got such a grip on him that he desisted from further social amenities. Pincher quite understood his silence, though she, with her furry coat and hard exercise, was not as near freezing as he.

At length they perceived, close to the road, a dim light shining from a single point in a hud-

dled group of buildings. The wagon turned into a corral, close to a tumble-down shanty, and as Rankin rode up to the opening the children were just disappearing in at the door, while the woman slowly and painfully climbed down over the wheel. Rumpety stood by, jeering at her slow progress.

"Come, horry a little, me foine lady," Rankin heard him say. "Horry, or I 'll come and give ye a lift ye 'll not thank me for!"

The poor creature's dress had caught in something, and she stood an instant on the hub.

With a sudden movement the brute raised the long whip he held in his hand and gave her a stinging blow across the shoulders. There was a faint moan, a sound of tearing cotton, and the woman fell in a heap to the ground. In another instant she had scrambled to her feet and fled limping into the house.

Ed Rankin felt the blood rush to his heart and then go tingling down into his finger-tips; but he made no sound nor sudden movement. With his teeth set hard, his hand clutching his cow-hide whip, he got off his horse and stood on the ground.

"I guess I 'll wait till he 's given the critters their supper," he muttered in Pincher's ear.

"He might forget to do it after I 'm done with him."

He stood looking into the enclosure while Rumpety unharnessed "the critters" and put them up in an open shed.

The corral was a comfortless, tumble-down place. The outlines of the crazy huts and sheds which enclosed it on three sides showed clear in the starlight. A gaunt plough-horse stood motionless in the cold shelter of a skeleton hay-wagon; in one corner a drinking-trough gleamed, one solid mass of ice. And now across this dreary, God-forsaken stage passed the warmly clad, stalwart figure that Fate was waiting for. Rankin noted that he held the whip still in his hand as he made for the door of the cabin.

Suddenly Rankin blocked his path.

"*You cur!*"

The words were flung like a missile into the face of the brute.

With a cry of inarticulate rage Rumpety raised his long whip, and then, coward that he was, let it fall.

Rankin never had a very clear idea of what happened next. Somehow or other he had torn the coat off the man's back, had bound him with the lasso to a corner of the hay-

wagon, and was standing over him, cow-hide in hand, panting with rage and the desire for vengeance. The gaunt horse had moved off a few paces, and stood like an apparition, gazing with spectral indifference at the scene.

Rankin raised his arm and brought the whip-lash whistling down upon the broad shoulders. There was a strange guttural sound, and the figure before him seemed to collapse and sink, a dead weight, down into the encircling rope. Rankin's arm was arrested in mid-air.

"Stand up, you hound, or I 'll murder you!" he hissed between his teeth.

But the figure hung there like a log. The spectral horse sniffed strangely.

A swift horror seized upon Rankin. He grasped the heavy shoulder and shook it roughly. It was like shaking—hush! he dared not think what!

Rankin flung his whip to the ground, and wildly, feverishly, untied the rope. It was a difficult thing to do, the sinking of the body having tightened the knots. At last they yielded, and the dead weight tumbled in a heap before him. Even in his wild horror Rankin thought how the woman had fallen just so in a heap on the ground a few minutes before. The thought put life into his heart.

The gaunt horse had taken a step forward and was sniffing at that heap on the ground, mouthing the limp trousers : a few wisps of hay had clung to them. Rankin watched the weird scene. He knew that that was a dead man before him ; nothing could make that surer.

He tried to lift the body and carry it toward the house ; he could not do it. It was not the weight, it was the repulsion that lamed him.

He stalked to the cabin and flung open the door. The woman crouched in a corner with her six children about her ; seven pitiful scared faces were lifted to his. He stepped in and closed the door behind him.

" Dennis Rumpety is dead," he stated, in a hard, unnatural voice. It seemed to him as if those awful words must echo round the globe, rousing all the powers of the land against him, striking terror to the hearts at home.

The woman glanced about her with wandering eyes. Then she shook her head.

" Dinnis Rumpety ? Sure he 'll niver be dead ! "

" I tell you Dennis Rumpety is dead. I have killed him ! "

" You ! " she shrieked. " The saints preserve ye ! "

It was a ghastly work to get that dishonored body across the corral while the spectral horse came sniffing after. Rankin wondered whether the dishonored soul could be far away. He wondered that the woman and children did not seem to dread being left alone with—*it*. He did not know how futile ghostly horrors seemed, as compared with those horrors they had thrust out.

As Pincher bore him back over the fourteen miles thither where justice awaited him, Rankin was a prey to two alternating regrets. At one moment he wished he had not said, "I 'll murder you!" In the next turn of thought he wished it had been murder in the first degree, that the penalty might have been death rather than imprisonment.

He did not allow himself to think of Myra Beckwith; his mind felt blood-stained, no fit place for the thought of her. There, where the thought of her had shone for months, a steady, heart-warming flame, was only a dull desolation which he dared not face.

As he rode up the deserted street of Sandoria a strong desire possessed him to keep on to the north and have one more night of freedom on his own ranch; but that would have been a cruelty to Pincher. He put her up in the

shed and gave her the next day's dinner which he had brought with him that morning in case there should be a dance to keep him over-night. Then he took a long, deep breath of the icy air and passed into the court-house.

Inside, the atmosphere seemed suffocating. The room was so crowded that he did not find Myra's face anywhere. The sheriff was among the dancers, but the fiddles were winding up the set with a last prolonged squeak.

As the scraping ceased, Rankin stood before the sheriff. In the sudden pause of sound and motion his voice sounded distinctly throughout the room.

"I have just killed Dennis Rumpety," he said.

For ten seconds there was absolute silence; then a rough voice growled, "Thunder! But you done a good job!"

Upon that everybody began talking at once, and in the midst of the clamor Ed Rankin, the man who loved freedom better than life, was formally placed under arrest.

His trial came off the next day but one. The coroner's inquest had shown death by apoplexy, caused probably by a paroxysm of rage. The jury rendered a verdict of "involuntary manslaughter." The sentence was the

lowest the law allows : namely, one day's imprisonment with hard labor.

This unlooked-for clemency staggered the prisoner. Oblivious of every fact but the terrible one that Dennis Rumpety had died by his hand, he had nerved himself for what he believed would be his death-blow. The tension had been too great ; he could not bear its sudden removal.

"Say, your honor," he cried, regardless of court etiquette,—"say, your honor, could n't you lay it on a little heavier?"

"The court sees no reason for altering its decision," his honor replied, gravely, passing on to the delivery of the next sentence.

But after the court had adjourned, the judge stepped up to the prisoner and said, kindly, "I would n't take it too hard, if I were you, Rankin. We all know that there was no murder in your heart."

"Yes, there was, your honor. Yes, there was."

"At any rate, the man's death was clearly not your deed. It was the hand of the Lord that did it."

"I don't know, your honor," Rankin persisted. "It feels to me as though it was me that done it."

The judge and the lookers-on were puzzled by this persistency. It did not seem in character. For the first time in his life, Rankin felt the need of words. The moral perplexity was too great for him to deal with; he was reaching out for something to take hold of, a thing which his self-contained, crudely disciplined nature had never craved before.

"It 's an awful thing to send a soul to hell," he muttered.

Then, in his extremity, he felt a soft touch upon his arm. Myra Beckwith stood beside him.

"Ed," she said, with the sweet seriousness which had first attracted him, and now at last there was the tone in her voice which he would have given his life to hear,—"Ed, think of the seven souls you have delivered out of hell! I was over to see them yesterday."

The consolation of that voice and touch calmed his troubled spirit, restored him to himself; the nightmare of the last two days faded and slid away. He stood a moment in awkward silence, while Myra's hand rested upon his arm; then, before them all, he laid his hand upon it, and, with the solemnity of a priest before the altar, he said, "I guess it was the Lord that done it, after all!"

VI.

THE LAME GULCH PROFESSOR.

SIMON AMBERLEY had never been able to strike root in life, until, some ten years since, he found a congenial soil in that remote fastness of the Rocky Mountains known as Lame Gulch. From the first moment of his arrival there it was borne in upon him that this was the goal of his long, apparently aimless pilgrimage, and he lost no time in securing to himself a foothold, by the simple and inexpensive method of taking up a ranch.

The land he chose was higher up the Gulch than any of the neighboring ranches, and all that it was rich in was views. It ran up the side of a hill, seen from the top of which, the whole Rocky Mountain Range had the appearance of marshalling itself in one grand, exhaustive cyclorama. On every hand were snowy summits forming a titantic ring which

seemed to concentrate upon Lame Gulch ; and much of the sense of aloofness and security which was the chief element in Amberley's content came from the illusion which he carefully guarded, that that wall of giants really was impenetrable. He liked, too, to feel himself at a great altitude above the lower world where he had so long and vainly toiled.

"Nine thousand feet above sea-level!" he would assure himself in self-congratulatory mood. "When I come to quit, I sha'n't hev fur to go!" which confidence in the direction his spirit was destined to take, may fairly be accepted as indication of a good conscience.

Amberley had not married, and although he felt the omission to be matter for regret, he had never, as far as his recollection served him, found his wish to do so particularized in favor of any one woman.

"No, I ain't never married," he reluctantly admitted, when Enoch Baker, his next-door neighbor at Lame Gulch, pressed the point.

Enoch lived with his wife just round on the other side of Bear Mountain, only three miles away, and although his now elderly consort was reputed to be unamiable,—not to say cantankerous,—yet her existence, and the existence in the world outside, of many children

and grandchildren, conferred upon him the enviable dignity of a man of family. He was a Yankee, and his thirst for information was not to be lightly appeased.

"Disapp'inted?" he asked, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and pulling out a venerable tobacco-pouch, with a view to "fillin' her up" again. "Disapp'inted?"

"Yes; ruther,—bein' as I was always fond of children."

Amberley was himself a tall, limp-looking down-easter, with pleasant, unsuspicious eyes, and a guileless spirit. He used to hand his cattle over to Baker once a year, and let him drive them with his own down the long mountain road to Springtown, and it was understood than he did not inquire too curiously in the matter of commissions. The stores and fodder which Enoch delivered over to him in exchange, together with a plausibly varying amount of hard cash, seemed to Simon an ample return for the scrawny cattle he sent to market. And Enoch, for his part, was always willing to testify that Amberley was a pleasant man to deal with.

"What was she like?" Enoch inquired, in the tone of a connoisseur, transfixing Amberley with his shrewd eyes.

"Don't know 's I could tell you, neighbor. I kind o' fancied the ones with the snappin' black eyes. But I ruther guess some other kind would ha' done 's well, when it come to the pint."

Enoch raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Would n't ary one on 'em hev you?" he asked.

"Never asked 'em," was the reply. "It was this way," Amberley went on, gathering himself together for the unaccustomed effort of expounding a situation. "I never seemed to feel to hev *gumption* enough to raise a family."

Enoch's countenance took on a judicial look. "Yet you 've got a good eddication," he remarked, after thoughtful consideration of the case. "You 've got book larnin' enough to make your way."

"Wall, yes; the eddication 's stayed by me. I ruther guess 't was the gumption that got knocked out. That was at Antietam."

"Did n't know you was in the war," Enoch exclaimed, with a visible accession of respect. "Was you hit?"

"Wall, yes; in the head. I wa' n't much more 'n a youngster, and when they let me loose the doctors said I was good 's new; 'n

I ruther guess I was, all except the gumption. 'T was kind o' curous, too," he went on, warming to his subject, and fumbling at something on the side of his head. "When the bullet ploughed through here, the settin' sun was in my eyes ; 'n soon 's I got on my feet agin I wanted to go West. I was let go there in Virginia, 'n though I hankered after my own folks as bad as anybody, there was nothin' for it, but to turn toward the settin' sun. 'N fust I went to Ohio, 'n then to Illinois, 'n then to Missouri, 'n so on here. Never could manage to stop more 'n a few years in one place till I come up agin the Rocky Mountings. Since then I 've felt kind o' settled and satisfied."

But Simon's satisfaction was destined to be rudely broken in upon.

One pleasant September day somebody picked up something in the Gulch that looked like a dingy bit of quartz, and carried it down to Springtown, and shortly after that a squad of men appeared upon the scene. The mountains, faithless to their trust, had let them in. They gathered together along the Gulch and on the side of Bear Mountain, where Amberley could see them, little remote groups, sometimes losing themselves among the pine-trees, sometimes showing plain against the sky on

the exposed comb of the mountain-side. By and by more men came and rougher ones, bringing mules and oxen with them, and camping in tents which they deserted by day. When the early snow came, Amberley could see, more plainly than before, the doings of the encroaching enemy. Great black scars were made in the snow ; sledges, laden with weird, ungainly masses of wood and iron, were hauled up the mountain-side. Here and there a structure appeared, that had a grotesque resemblance to a gallows. The uncouth monsters planted themselves along the hillside, where they breathed forth smoke and emitted strange noises. Amberley could hear the rattling of chains, the creaking of timbers ; a hoarse shout would sometimes come ringing across the Gulch through the thin frosty air, if the wind was that way.

In September it was that the bit of quartz was carried down to Springtown ; before the winter snows had thought of melting, a town of rude frame huts had sprung up in the hollow below, and Lame Gulch was a flourishing mining-camp. All the rough-scuff of the country-side promptly gathered there, and elbowed, with equal indifference, the honest miner, the less honest saloon-keeper, and the

capitalist, the degree of whose claim to that laudatory adjective was not to be so easily fixed. No one seemed out of place in the crazy, zigzag streets, no sound seemed foreign to this new, conglomerate atmosphere. The fluent profanity of the mule-driver, the shrill laugh of the dance-hall ; the prolonged rattle and final roar of the ore-chute, the steady pick of the laborer at the prospect-hole ;—each played its part to burden and stain the pure, high air that had seemed so like the air of Heaven itself.

Amberley stayed on in his lonely lean to, or roamed over his desecrated acres, bewildered and aggrieved. What were the mountains thinking of to admit these savage hordes ! Whither should he go, where should he find a refuge, since his trusted allies had played him false ? He loathed it all, loathed most of all Enoch's exultant suggestion that there might be gold on their land.

"But we 'll lay low for a while," Enoch said, with an air of profound cunning. "We 'll wait till they 're plumb crazy, and then we kin git our own price ! "

And Amberley stayed on all through that trying winter, simply because he knew of no better place to go to, and the spring came and

found him there, unreconciled, to be sure, but leading his usual life. And so it happened that one day, when the snow had disappeared from all the southerly slopes, and the wind was toward the Camp, so that the sounds he hated came dulled and hushed to his ear, Amberley ventured a few rods down the hillside in search of a missing calf. The truant was a pretty, white-nosed creature, a special pet of his master's, with great brown, confiding eyes, and ample ears, and Amberley had named him Simon. Not a usual name for a calf, as Simon was well aware, but somehow it gave the lonely man a peculiar pleasure to know that his name was borne by a cheerful young thing, with frisky tail and active legs, and everything to live for.

As the elder Simon strolled down the hillside on this particular spring day, calling and peering from side to side, his eye fell upon the first daisy of the season, nestling close at his feet,—a single blossom among a crowded group of little short-stemmed scrubby buds. He stooped to pick it, and was standing, lost in wonder over its frailty and its hardihood, when a child's voice struck his ear, calling, "Come Bossie, come!"

Stepping around a projecting rock close at hand, Amberley came upon a pretty scene,

On a wide level sunny space, where young grass was already springing, stood a little figure in blue, with yellow hair flying about in the breeze ; a tiny hand filled with grass, held out toward the doubtful yet covetous Simon Jr. The child stood perfectly still, her square little back turned to her new observer, while the calf stumped cautiously toward her. At a safe distance he stopped and sniffed at the tiny hand, then kicked up his heels and pranced away again. The little drama repeated itself several times, the child standing always motionless, with extended arm, and calling upon "Bossie" in enticing tones to come.

Won over at last by her constancy,—or by his own greed,—"Bossie" ventured near enough to snatch the proffered tidbit ; then off he scampered, in ungrateful haste, mouthing the delicate morsel.

A sigh of relief and satisfaction went up from the little figure, while one small hand gravely rubbed and kneaded the arm which had so pluckily maintained its uncomfortable position. Amberley approached with his short-stemmed daisy.

"How do you do, little girl?" he inquired in his most polite manner. "Would you like a daisy?"

"Yes," was the reply, spoken with a slight lisp.

"You are very good to feed Simon," Amberley proceeded, quite set at ease by the gracious acceptance of his offering.

"Yes;" said the child once more, this time with a rising inflection.

"Simon is my calf, you know," Amberley went on. "Here, Simon, come along."

Simon Jr., was already approaching, with an eye to business, and even as his master spoke, he had got his nose into a certain wide, baggy pocket in the old army trousers, and was poking it about in very familiar fashion.

"Wait a minute, Simon," said Amberley, drawing himself gently away. "Here, little girl, you take a bit of the salt in your hand and he 'll come for it."

"Yes," came the assenting voice; and Simon Jr., once convinced that the pocket was closed to him, approached the child with easy confidence, and not only devoured the proffered salt, but continued to lick the grimy little palm when it was quite bare of that pleasing stimulant.

Then the child laughed, a queer little short, grown-up laugh, and declared: "I like Simon."

"So do I," said Amberley, casting about for

some new blandishment. "Let 's come up to the shanty and draw a picture of him."

"Yes," the little sphinx replied.

Amberley held out his hand, with a poignant dread lest she should refuse to take it; a thrill of pleasure, almost as poignant, went up his arm and so on to his heart, as the tiny hand rested in his own.

"What is your name?" he asked. They were rounding the big boulder and beginning the short ascent to the cabin.

"Eliza Christie, and I 'm six years old," she replied, tugging the while at his hand, to help herself over a rough place. Then,— "What 's yours?" she asked.

"Simon Amberley."

"Same 's the calf," she commented. "Was either of you named for the other?"

"Yes; the calf was."

"I was named for my sainted grandmother. Bella Jones says Eliza 's an ugly name, but Ma says if 't was good enough for my sainted grandmother it 's good enough for me."

"*I* think Eliza 's a real pretty name," Amberley declared in a tone of conviction, as he warded off the renewed advances of Simon. "If ever I have another calf I shall call it Eliza."

"I like both the Simons," Eliza announced, with flattering openness.

To such a declaration as this, modesty forbade any reply, and the two went on in silence to the cabin door, closely followed by the white-nosed gourmand.

Outside the lean-to was a bench, roughly modelled on Amberley's recollection of the settle outside his mother's kitchen door.

"You 'd better set there, Eliza," he said; "It 's prettier outside than in;" and he lifted her to the seat, and left her there, with her fat little legs sticking straight out in front of her.

She seemed to take very naturally to the situation, and indeed her small, sturdy person looked as much a part of the homely scene as the stubby little daisy she held in her hand. As she sat there in the sunshine, placid and self-contained, a mysterious trampling and crackling began among the trees close at hand, and one after another, three solemn-eyed cows emerged into the clearing and fixed a wondering gaze upon the little visitor. She, nothing daunted, calmly returned their gaze, only holding the daisy a little more tightly, lest one of the new-comers should take it into her head to dispute the prize; and Simon found her, upon

his return, confronting the horned monsters with unruffled tranquillity.

Acknowledging the presence of the cows only by a friendly "Shoo, there!" he established himself beside his waiting guest upon the settle, his long legs crossed, by way of a table.

"Can you draw?" he asked.

"No; I don't know my letters," she replied, with unconscious irrelevance.

"How would you like to have me learn you?"

"I'd like it."

"Well; I'll learn you *O* first. That's the first letter I learned;" and he made a phenomenally large and round *O* in the upper left-hand corner of the sheet. The paper, finding insufficient resting-place upon the bony knee, took occasion to flap idly in the gentle southerly breeze; upon which the child took hold of it with a quaint air of helpfulness which was singularly womanly.

"Now I've learned *O*," she remarked, "I'd like to learn another."

"Well, there's an *I*; see, there?"

"The other one looks more like an eye," she observed critically.

"So it does, so it does!" Amberley admitted,

much impressed by the discovery. "But then it 's an *O* all the same, and this one is an *I*."

"Yes; well, I 've learned that. Now, make another."

Thus unheralded and unawares come the great moments of life. When little Eliza mounted that wooden settle, her mind was innocent of artificial accomplishments; before she again stood on her round fat legs, she had begun the ascent of that path which leads away up to the heights of human knowledge. It is a long ascent and few accomplish it, but the first essential steps had been taken: little Eliza had become a *Scholar*!

Not only had she learned to recognize an *O* and an *I*, an *S*, an *M*, and an *N*, but she had laboriously made each one of them with her own hand. And, furthermore, she had seen them combined in a wonderful group which, if her teacher was to be credited, stood for *Simon*! It was better than drawing, infinitely better! Anybody could make a round thing with four crooked legs and a thin tail, and call it a calf—but only a scholar could put five letters together and make them stand for a man and a calf beside; a man with a kind voice and a big beard, and a calf that would lick a person's hand! Oh, but life had grown

a wonderful thing to little Eliza, when she trotted down the hillside, clinging to the fingers of her new friend, and holding the sturdy little daisy in the other sturdy little hand.

And life had grown even more wonderful to Simon Amberley. He had not passed such a pleasant day since he could remember, and he had certainly never in his life had so much to look forward to; for had not Eliza promised to come again the next day, and to bring Bella Jones with her?

He went into the cabin after his chores were done, and pulled out an old cowhide trunk with the hair pretty well worn off it, and there, inside, he found the battered family Bible which had been sent out, at his request, when his mother died; and a copy of Shakespeare's *Plays* in one volume which he had got as a prize at school. There, too, were Miss Edgeworth's *Rosamond*, and Nathaniel P. Willis' *Poems*, and one volume of Dr. Kane's *Explorations at the North Pole*. "Quite a library," he said to himself, with conscious pride. He had not read in a book for twenty years; not since the time, back in Ohio, when he had bought Scott's complete Works at auction, and had to sell them again to pay his way to Missouri,

whither he had gone in obedience to that mysterious prompting of the setting sun.

By and by he strolled up the hill to get the sunset light. It was very splendid on the glittering snow of the heights over yonder. After all, he reflected, the mountains knew pretty well what they were about. If they had not let the enemy through, those little girls would not have got in, and he should not have felt as if he were beginning life all over again.

Before a month had passed, Simon found himself established in the new character of Lame Gulch Professor. So, at least, Enoch called him, and it was not displeasing to the subject of Enoch's pleasantry to know that others had adopted the suggestion and bestowed upon him that honorable title. His little class numbered fifteen or twenty children of assorted ages and dispositions, who came, lured by rumors of pleasant things, and remained to imbibe learning with more or less avidity. There was an absence of restraint about this novel school which appealed strongly to the childish heart. The scholars were free to come and go as they pleased, a privilege which, once established, they were not inclined to take undue advantage of. They sat on the most amusing seats, improvised from

fallen tree trunks, or small wood-piles, or cocks of hay. They called their teacher what they pleased: sometimes Simon, sometimes Teacher, sometimes Mister! Bella Jones always said "Perfessor." They studied from whatever book they liked best, each child bringing the "Reader" or "Speller" he could most easily lay hands on. But they learned more from Simon's books than from their own. That book of William Shakespeare's stood easily first in their estimation, for when the "perfessor" read from it, they somehow understood the story, in spite of the hard words which, taken by themselves, seemed to mean nothing at all.

If a ground squirrel scuttled across the clearing, no one was so quick to observe him as the teacher himself, and before Fritz Meyer could seize a stone to fire at the tame little chap, the young sportsman had become so interested in something Simon was saying about its ways and nature, that he forgot what he wanted of the stone.

"How do you spell squirrel?" asked a sharp-featured boy one day, as he watched the twinkling eyes of one of the tiny creatures.

Simon drew his brows together over his mild eyes, with a mighty effort at thinking.

"How do you spell squirrel?" he repeated. "How do you spell it? Well; you begin with an *sk*, of course—and then there 's a *w*.—I don't know, Tim, but that 's too hard a word to spell until you 're growed up. But I 'll learn you to spell woodchuck! We used to go after woodchucks when I was a youngster."

What boy could insist upon the spelling of a paltry little ground squirrel, with beady eyes and nervous, inconsequent motions, when there was talk of a woodchuck, lowering in his black hole, ready to fix his sharp teeth in the nose of the first intruding terrier? If they learned in after years that the spelling-books knew nought of a *k* or a *w* in squirrel,—and some of them never did!—we may be very sure that it was not Simon Amberley that fell in their estimation!

Sometimes Simon Jr. came to school, and there was a sudden, exhilarating scramble in pursuit of his tail; now and then a hard-worked mother would bring her baby and sit as guest of honor in Simon's solitary "cane-bottom," where she would inadvertently learn items of interest with regard to "yon Cassius," or "bluff Harry," or a certain young lady who was described as being "little" but "fierce,"—a good deal like Molly Tinker whose "man"

kept the "Golden Glory Saloon." On one occasion a rattlesnake lifted its head drowzily from behind a rock near by, and was despatched off-hand by Simon. It was this exploit which filled the measure of Simon's fame.

"Any fool kin learn readin' an' writin'," said Patsy Linders, the eldest of the band, who, by the way, had yet to prove himself fool enough to do so. "But I 'll be durned if I ever seen a *stun* fired as neat as that!"

"Simon 's smarter 'n anybody," little Eliza declared in reply. "He's smarter 'n you nor me, 'n he 's smarter 'n David an' Goliath, 'n he 's my Simon!"

No one was disposed to question Eliza's prior claim to Simon. She always sat beside him on the original settle against the lean-to. She would not abdicate the seat even when the ground grew hot and pleasant and she saw half her mates lying on the short sparse grass with their heels in the air, conning their books, or falling asleep over them, as the case might be. She felt it her prerogative to sit right there, with her chubby legs sticking out in front of her; there, where she could pull at Simon's sleeve and interrupt his discourse as often as she pleased.

And so it came about, that by the time

spring had passed into summer, sumptuous wild-flowers succeeding the first little scrubby daisy, a blessèd idyl of quaint child life, dear to Simon's heart, had grown out of the chance meeting on the hillside. It was as if Simon's clearing were a charmed circle into which no evil could enter, to which no echo of the greed and brutality of the mining-camp could make its way. When his permission was respectfully asked to sink a few prospect holes on his land, Simon unhesitatingly rejected the proposal, with all its glittering possibilities. As soon would the President and Fellows of Harvard College permit the sinking of prospect holes in the sacred "yard" itself, as the Lame Gulch Professor allow his "school" to be molested.

But, alas! it is written in the books that no earthly circle shall be forever charmed, no human enterprise exempt from evil. And it was little Eliza herself, Simon's champion and dictator, faithful, plucky little Eliza, by whom the evil entered in.

She came, one hot July day, and planted herself quite unconcernedly beside the professor, and he, looking down into the funny little round face, beheld a great black-and-blue bump on the forehead. The sight grieved him to the soul, even before he knew its tragic meaning.

"Did you tumble down, Eliza?" he asked with great concern.

"No," said Eliza.

"Did you bump your head agin something?"

"No."

"Did anybody hurt you?" and already the professor was casting wrathful glances from boy to boy, well calculated to strike terror to the heart of the culprit.

"Not much;" said the matter-of-fact little voice.

"I guess 't was her pa done it," spoke up Patsy Linders. "He 's a bloomin' terror when he 's drunk."

Without a word, Simon rose and led the little creature into the lean-to, where he tenderly bathed the bruise in cold water, giving no voice to the swelling indignation that tore through him. His tone and touch were but the gentler for that, as he sought to soothe the self-contained little victim, who, truth to tell, seemed not much in need of his ministrations.

"My lamb!" he murmured. "My little lamb!"

"Ma said to never mind," the plucky little lamb remarked. "He ain 't often so."

"Do you love your father?" asked Simon, seeking to fathom the blue eyes for the truth.

The blue eyes were, for the moment, intent upon a swarm of flies disporting themselves upon the window-pane.

"Do you love your father?" Simon asked again.

"No;" quoth Eliza, "I wish he was dead."

Now Simon Amberley was slow to anger; indeed it may be doubted whether he had ever in all his life before been thoroughly roused; and perhaps for that very reason, the surging flood of indignation, so new to his experience, seemed to him like a call from heaven. All day he fed his wrath on the deeds of Scripture warriors, reading aloud from the sacred records, till Patsy Linders exclaimed, enraptured, that "the Bible was a durned good book, by Jiminy!"

Little Eliza stayed on, as she often did after the school was dispersed, sure that "her Simon," would find some new and agreeable entertainment for her.

"Did your father ever hit you before?" Amberley asked casually, as they strung a handful of painter's-brush into a garland, which it was thought might prove becoming to Simon Jr.'s complexion.

"Yes," said Eliza.

"More than once?"

"Yes."

"Where did he hit you last time?"

"Here." And Eliza pulled up the blue calico sleeve, and displayed a pretty bad bruise on the arm.

Simon paused a moment in his cross-examination.

"And you wish he was dead?" he asked at last, between his set teeth.

"Yes."

"What does he look like?"

"Something like you," was the startling response; "only different."

The amendment was, at first blush, more gratifying to Simon than the original statement. Yet, when Eliza was gone, he went and looked in his bit of a looking-glass, half hoping to find some touch of the latent ruffian in his face. All he saw there was a kindly, unalarming countenance, with a full blond beard, and thick blond hair. The eyes had a look of bewilderment which did not lessen their habitual mildness. He straightened his tall form, and threw his shoulders back, and he set his mouth in a very firm, determined line; but, somehow, the mild eyes would not flash, and a profound mis-

giving penetrated his soul. Was he the man, after all, to terrorize a ruffian? The ruffian in question was an unknown quantity to his would-be intimidator, who boasted but a calling acquaintance with Eliza's mother,—a pale, consumptive creature, with that "better-days" air about her, which gives the last touch of pitifulness to poverty and hardship.

Little as he had frequented the now thriving metropolis of Lame Gulch, Amberley knew pretty well where to look for his man, and as he sallied forth that same evening, with the purpose of investigating the "unknown quantity," he bent his steps, not in the direction of the rickety cabin in the hollow there, but toward the "Lame Gulch Opera House." This temple of the muses was easily discoverable, being situated in the main street of the town, and marked by a long transparency projecting above the door, upon which the luminous inscription, "Opera House," was visible from afar.

Upon entering beneath this alluring sign, Amberley found himself in a full-blown "sample room," the presence of whose glittering pyramids of bottles was still further emphasized by the following legend, "Patronize the bar and walk in!" which was inscribed above an inner portal.

The new-comer stepped up to the bar-tender.

"Do you know whether a miner named Conrad Christie is in there?" he asked.

"I guess likely enough," was the reply. "Mr. Christie is one of our regular patrons. Won't you take a drink, Mister?"

"No;" said Simon, shortly.

"No? Ain't that ruther a pity? But pass right in, Sir. Any friend of Mr. Christie's is welcome here."

Whereupon Mr. Christie's "friend" passed through the door, into the long, narrow "Opera House." It was a dirty, cheerless hole, in spite of the brilliance of many oil lamps, shining among the flimsy decorations. At the end of the tunnel-shaped room was a rude stage, festooned with gaudy, squalid hangings, beneath which a painted siren was singing a song which Simon did not listen to. The floor of the auditorium was filled with chairs and tables in disorderly array, the occupants of which seemed to be paying more attention to their liquor and their cards than to the cracked voice of the songstress. There was a rattling of glasses, the occasional clink of money, frequent shrill laughs and deeper-chested oaths and guffaws; the fumes of beer and whisky mingled with the heavy canopy of

smoke which gave to the flaring lights a lurid aspect, only too well befitting the place and the occasion.

"Wal, I swan!" exclaimed a familiar voice close at Simon's elbow: and, turning, he beheld the doughty Enoch, seated at a table close to the door, imbibing beer at the hands of a gaudy young woman in a red silk gown.

Simon looked at the elderly transgressor in speechless astonishment.

"Yas, here I be," said Enoch, jauntily, "consortin' with the hosts of Belial. Take a cheer, Simon, take a cheer."

"I guess not," said Simon, slowly; "I don't have no special hankerin' after Belial, myself. Do you happen to know a man named Conrad Christie?"

"Him's the gentleman," the red-silk Hebe volunteered. "Him in the yeller beard and the red necktie, rakin' in the chips."

Amberley took a critical survey of his adversary. He was a man of forty, or thereabouts, singularly like Simon himself in build and coloring, with enough of the ruffian in his aspect to give the professor an envious sense of inferiority. He was playing cards with a fierce-looking fellow in a black beard, who seemed to be getting the worst of it.

Simon was conscious afterwards of having turned his back on Enoch rather abruptly; of having interrupted, by his departure, an outpouring of confidence in regard to "Mis' Baker's tantrums." At the time, however, he had but one thought and that was to strike while the iron was hot. He felt that the iron was becoming very hot indeed, as he stepped up to the yellow-haired gambler, who was again engaged in the satisfactory ceremony of "rakin' 'em in."

"Mr. Christie," Simon said, and hot as the iron was, he could not control a slight tremor in his voice, not of fear, but of excitement. "Mr. Christie, I've got something to say to you. Will you step outside with me?"

Christie measured his interlocutor from head to foot, till Simon felt himself insulted in every inch of his person. The peace-loving hermit had time for blood-thirsty thoughts before the answer struck his ear.

"Not much!" came the reply at last, while the speaker gathered up the cards and began dealing. "If this place is good enough for me, I reckon it's good enough for a blasted Sissy of your description!"

No one would do Mr. Christie the injustice to suppose that his remark was unembellished

by more forcible expressions than are hereby recorded. Yet, somehow, the worst of them lacked the sting that Simon managed to get into his reply, as he said, in a suppressed voice: "This place ain't good enough, as far 's that goes, for the meanest skunk God ever created! But it 'll do for what we 've got to settle between us."

"Have a seat, Mister?"

A sick-looking girl, with blazing cheeks, had placed a chair for him. "Have a——"

The words died on her lips before the solemn, reproachful look the professor turned upon her.

"And Jinny looked smart
As a cranberry tart!"

sang the discordant voice from the stage, which nobody thought of listening to.

"It 's the Lame Gulch Professor," the black-haired man remarked, taking a look at his cards, before turning to his glass for refreshment.

"Damn the Lame Gulch Professor!" Christie retorted, by way of acknowledging the introduction.

Then Simon spoke again.

"Mr. Christie, you 've got the prettiest and smartest little girl in Lame Gulch," he de-

clared, laying down his proposition in a tone of extreme deliberation; "and you hit her over the head last night, and 't ain't the first time neither."

"Is that the latest news you 've got to give us?" asked Christie, passing his hand caressingly over his pistol, which lay like a lap-dog on his knees.

"Better let that alone," said the black-haired gambler, persuasively. "The professor 's ben good to my kids."

The threat was so very covert that the sensitive Christie did not feel himself called upon to recognize it as such.

"*He* ain't no target," Christie declared, with unutterable contempt. "I 'd as soon shoot a door-mat!" whereupon he proceeded, in a disengaged manner, to empty the contents of the black bottle into a glass, flinging the bottle under the table, with a praiseworthy regard for appearances.

Simon breathed deep and hard, and again there was an exasperating tremor in his low-pitched voice, which drawled more than usual, as he said:

"No; 't ain't the latest news! What I specially come to tell you was, that if you ever lay hands on that child agin, I 'll shoot

you deader 'n any door-mat you ever wiped your great cowardly boots on!"

Each word of this speech seemed to cleave its separate, individual way with a slow, ponderous significance. Christie passed his hand absently down the barrel of the pistol on his knees, till his fingers rested on the trigger. If he had had any murderous intention, however, he seemed to think better of it, for he contented himself with a shrug and an oath, and the supercilious inquiry: "What are you givin' us, anyway?" The man of the black beard eyed his movements with a furtive interest. Amberley stood a moment, to give a still more deliberate emphasis to his words, thinking, the while, that in spite of the unvarnished frankness on either side, neither he nor his adversary had quite made each other out. Then he turned and threaded his way among the tables to the door, as quietly and composedly as he had come; while the girl on the stage repeated the assertion in regard to "Jinny's" smart looks, in which she seemed still unable to awaken the slightest interest in those who should have been her auditors. Before he had passed Enoch's chair, which was placed discreetly near the exit, the pair of gamblers were at it again. Not even the luck

had been turned by the interruption. Christie was sweeping in the chips to the same refrain of the "cranberry tarts."

When, to Simon's infinite relief, little Eliza appeared at school the next morning, the teacher scrutinized her jealously in search of bumps and bruises. There was nothing to be seen but the original bump, and that was reduced in size, though somewhat intensified in color, since the day before.

"I wonder how I should feel when I had shot him!" thought Simon, and his mind reverted to the rattlesnake, and to a sneaking compunction which had seized him when the tail gave its death-quiver. The possibility of missing his mark when once obliged to shoot did not enter his mind. He was fighting on the side of right and justice, and possessing, as he did, but small knowledge of the world and its ways, he had implicit faith in the triumphant out-come of all such encounters.

He took small credit to himself for any temerity he had shown. Somehow it seemed to him that the thing had been made very easy. He felt moderately sure that he owed his safety to the villainous-looking man in the black beard; and, indeed, that was quite in order, for he had been given to understand

that Providence was not above making use of the meanest instruments to the accomplishment of a good end. There were times when he was even constrained to hope that, by the same Great Influence, a spark of magnanimity had been awakened in Christie's abandoned soul; and once, when Eliza reported that her "pa" had given her a nickle, he almost believed that those seemingly ineffective words of his had, thanks to that same all-powerful intervention, made an impression. He became positively hopeful that this might be the case, when nearly a month had passed, and no further harm had come to his "lamb."

One morning Bella Jones, who ordinarily kept rather fashionable hours, came panting up the hill, the first to arrive. She was a dressy young person, whose father kept a "sample-room." Looking hastily about, to make sure that no one was there to have forestalled her, she cried, still quite out of breath:

"Eliza Christie, she's lost her ma! Died in the night of a hemorag! Eliza ain't cried a drop, 'n her pa he's just settin' there like he was shot!"

"Like he was shot!" Simon shivered at the words as if a cold wind had passed, striking a chill through the intense August day.

The professor kept school that morning as usual, but he did not sit on the settle against the lean-to, and when Patsy Linders undertook to hoist himself up on it, the boy got his ears boxed. Patsy stated afterwards, in maintenance of the justifiable pride of "ten years goin' on eleven," that he "would n't ha' took it from anybody but the perfessor," and he "would n't ha' took it from him, if 't had n't a ben for that snake!"

It was high noon. The sun was pouring down upon the group of children in the clearing in front of the lop-sided cabin, and upon the empty settle up against it; upon the brooding heights that spanned the horizon beyond the Gulch, upon the fragrant pine-trees close at hand. Simon Jr. had just strayed along with a blossoming yucca protruding from his mouth, and the professor had driven him farther up the slope. Returning from this short excursion, Simon beheld two figures coming up the Gulch; a blond-bearded man, and a little girl in blue. He hurried toward them in real trepidation. He could not bear to see the lamb actually in the company of the wolf. The three met on the edge of the clearing; Christie was the first to speak.

"I've brought you Eliza," he said, in a

steady, matter-of-fact voice, something like Eliza's own. "Her ma's dead, 'n you can have her 'f you want her. She thinks you'd like her."

"What do you mean?" asked Simon, his voice clouding over, so that it was hardly audible. "Can I hev her for my own?"

"Yes; that's the proposition! 'N there's a hundred dollars in her pocket which is all the capital I can raise to-day. I can do the funeral on tick. No; I won't try to get her away from you. She ain't my style."

Simon was stooping down with his eyes on a level with Eliza's.

"Say, Eliza," he asked, "would you like to be my little girl?"

"Yes," quoth Eliza.

"And come and live with me all the time?"

"Yes!" and she put out a little hand and touched his face.

"She won't be no great expense to you," said Christie.

Simon stood up and cast a significant glance about him.

"I guess if I let them prospectors in on my land," he said, "there won't be no great call for economizing!"

The two men stood a moment facing each

other with the same half-defiant, half-puzzled look they had exchanged at that other meeting, not so long ago. Christie was the first to break the silence.

"There wa' n't never much love lost between Eliza and me," he remarked, as if pursuing a train of thought that had been interrupted. "After the two boys died of the shakes, down in the Missouri Bottoms, both in one week, I kind o' lost my interest in kids. But I 'd like to know she was in better hands than mine, for her mother's sake."

"Eliza," said Simon, in a tone of gentle authority which the Lame Gulch Professor rarely assumed. "Eliza, give your pa that money, and tell him to bury your ma decent."

Christie took the money.

"Well," said he, "I guess you 're correct about the prospectors. They 're right after your claim !—Good-bye Eliza."

"Good-bye," said Eliza, digging the heel of her boot into the bed of pine needles.

Yet Christie did not go.

"I 'll send her duds up after the funeral," he said. "And her ma's things along with them. And, say !" he added with a sort of gulp of determination, while a dark flush went over his face. "About that *door-mat*, you

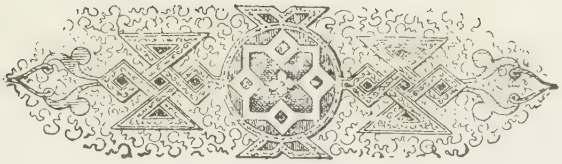
know. It was n't respectful and—*I apologize!*"

With that, Christie strode down the hill to his dead wife, and Simon and the child turned and walked hand in hand toward the lean-to. Half way across the clearing Simon Jr. unabashed by his late ejection, joined the pair.

"She 's our little girl now, Simon," said the professor, gravely.

"Yes," quoth Eliza, with equal gravity.

Upon which Simon Jr. kicked up his heels in the most intelligent manner, and pranced off in pursuit of the succulent yucca.



VII.

THE BOSS OF THE WHEEL.

WHEN contrasted with the ordinary grog-shop and gambling den of Lame Gulch, the barroom of the *Mountain Lion* has an air of comfort and propriety which is almost a justification of its existence. If men must drink and gamble,—and no one acquainted with a mining-camp would think of doubting the necessity,—here, at least, is a place where they may do so with comparative decency and decorum. The *Mountain Lion*, which is in every respect a well-conducted hostelry, tolerates no disorderly persons, and it is therefore the chosen resort, not only of the better class of transient visitors, but of the resident aristocracy as well. In the spacious office are gathered together each evening, mining-engineer and real-estate broker, experts and prospectors from Denver, men from Springtown in search of business and diversion, to

say nothing of visitors from the eastern and western seaboards; and hither, to the more secluded and less pretentious barroom, at least, come the better class of miners, those who have no special taste for bloodshed and other deviltry, and who occasionally go so far as to leave their firearms at home. Some slight prejudice, to be sure, was created among the independent Sons of Toil, when it was found that the *Mountain Lion* did not permit its waiters to smoke cigarettes while on duty; but such cavillers were much soothed upon learning that a "bust dude" had been quite as summarily dealt with when he broke forth into song at the dinner-table. This latter victim of severity and repression was a certain Mr. Newcastle, a "gent gone to seed" as he was subsequently described, and he had protested against unkind restrictions by declaring that such exhibitions of talent were *typ*-sical of a mining-camp. He pronounced *typ*-sical with an almost audible hyphen, as if his voice had stubbed its toe. But Mr. Newcastle's involuntary wit was of no avail, and he was forced to curb his songful spirit until a more fitting season.

So it came about that the *Mountain Lion* had not been in existence ten days before

it had gone on record as a thoroughly "first-class" establishment. No wonder, then, that an air of peculiar respectability attached itself to the "wheel" itself which revolved in a corner of the barroom night after night, whirling into opulence or penury, such as entrusted their fortunes to its revolutions. Despite its high-toned patronage, however, the terms "roulette" and "croupier" found small favor with the devotees at that particular shrine of the fickle goddess, and Dabney Dirke, its presiding genius, was familiarly known among "the boys," as "the boss of the wheel." "Waxey" Smithers,—he who was supposed to have precipitated Jimmy Dolan's exit from a disappointing world,—had been heard to say that "that feller Dirke" was too (profanely) high-toned for the job. Nevertheless, the wheel went round at Dirke's bidding as swiftly and uncompromisingly as heart could wish, and to most of those gathered about that centre of attraction the "boss" seemed an integral part of the machine.

Dabney Dirke was an ideal figure for the part he had to play. He was tall and thin and Mephistophelian, though not of the dark complexion which is commonly associated with Mephistopheles. His clean-shaven face got

its marked character, not from its coloring but from its cut; Nature's chisel would seem to have been more freely used than her brush in this particular production. The face was long and thin and severe, the nose almost painfully sensitive, the mouth thin and firmly closed rather than strong. The chin did not support the intention of the lips, nor did the brows quite do their duty by the eyes, which had a steely light, and might have gleamed with more effect if they had been somewhat more deeply set. The hair was sparse and light, and the complexion of that kind of paleness which takes on no deeper tinge from exposure to sun or wind or from passing emotion.

There were two indications that "the boss of the wheel" was also a gentleman;—he put on a clean collar every day, and he did not oil his hair. It would have been strange indeed if two such glaring peculiarities had escaped the subtle perception of Mr. Smithers, and it was rather to be wondered at that such inexcusable pretensions did not militate against the "boss" in his chosen calling.—That the calling was in this case deliberately chosen, may as well be admitted at the outset.

Dabney Dirke had once, in a very grievous moment, sworn that he would "go to the

devil," and had afterwards found himself so ill-suited to that hasty enterprise, that he had been somewhat put to it to get started on the downward path.

He was the only son of a Wall Street magnate who had had the misfortune to let his "transactions" get the better of him. Dirke often thought of his father when he watched the faces of the men about the "wheel." There was little in the outer aspect, even of the men of civilized traditions who stood among the gamblers, to remind him of the well-dressed, well-groomed person of his once prosperous parent. But in their faces, when the luck went against them, was a look that he was poignantly familiar with; a look which had first dawned in his father's face, flickeringly, intermittently, and which had grown and intensified, week after week, month after month, till it had gone out in the blankness of despair. That was when the elder Dirke heard his sentence of imprisonment. For Aaron Dirke's failure had involved moral as well as financial ruin.

He had died of the shock, as some of his creditors thought it behooved him to do,—died in prison after one week's durance. His son envied him; but dying is difficult in early

youth, and Dabney Dirke did not quite know how to set about.

Sometimes when he gave the wheel the fateful turn, he tried to cheat himself with an idea that it obeyed his will, this wonderful, dizzying, maddening wheel, with its circle of helpless victims. But there were moments when he felt himself more at the mercy of the wheel than any wretched gambler of them all. As he stood, with his curiously rigid countenance, performing his monotonous functions in the peculiar silence which characterizes the group around a gaming table, he sometimes felt himself in the tangible grasp of Fate ; as if the figures surrounding the table had been but pictures on his brain, and he, the puppet impersonating Fate to them, the real and only victim of chance. At such times he could get free from this imaginary bondage only by a deliberate summoning up of those facts of his previous existence which alone seemed convincingly real. They marshalled themselves readily enough at his bidding, those ruthless invaders of an easy, indolent life ;—penury and disgrace, wounded pride and disappointed love, and, bringing up the rear, that firm yet futile resolve of his to go to the devil. Dabney Dirke, with his tragic intensity, had often been the occasion of humor

in other men, but it is safe to say that his own mind had never been crossed by a single gleam of that illumining, revivifying flame. For that reason he took his fate and himself more seriously, Heaven help him !—than even his peculiar ill-fortune warranted.

At the time of his father's failure and disgrace he had been the accepted suitor of a girl whom he idealized and adored, and in his extremity she had failed him. She had weakly done as she was bid, and broken faith with him. It was on this occasion that he laid upon himself the burdensome task of which mention has been made.

"Frances," he had said, with the solemnity of a Capuchin friar taking his vows ; "Frances, if you cast me off I shall go to the devil !"

Frances was very sorry, and very reproachful, and withal, not a little flattered by this evidence of her negative influence ; but she gave him her blessing and let him go, whither he would ; and he, with the inconsequent obstinacy of his nature, carried with him a perfectly unimpaired ideal of her, sustained by her tearful assurance that she should always love him and pray for him. Even when he heard within the year that she was about to make a brilliant marriage with a titled Frenchman

whom she had met at Newport, he persisted in thinking of her as the victim, not of her own inconstancy, but of parental sternness. He sometimes saw her pretty face quite distinctly before his eyes, as he looked out across the swiftly spinning wheel, into the smoke-hung barroom,—the pretty face with the tearful eyes and the quivering lip of shallow feeling, the sincerity of which nothing could have made him doubt,—and somehow that pictured face had always the look of loving and praying for him.

There was a certain little ring, bearing a design of a four-leaved clover done in diamonds, a trinket of her girlhood days, which she used to let him wear "for luck." He had it on his little finger the day his father was sentenced. Its potency might fairly have been questioned after that, yet when she took it back he felt as if the act must have a blighting influence upon his destinies, quite apart from the broken engagement which it marked.

He had accepted for the nonce a place at the foot of the ladder in a bankers' and brokers' office which was offered him by one of the partners, an old friend of his father's. He held the place for some months, and, being quite devoid of ambition, he soon came to

loathe the daily grind. Through that, as through the later vicissitudes of his career, his mind clung, with a curious, mechanical persistency, to that troublesome vow which he had made.

The difficulty lay in his entire constitutional lack of vicious tendencies. He had no taste for drink and none for bad company; highway robbery was played out, and the modern substitutes for it were too ignoble to be thought of. Had that not been the case his perplexities might have found an easy solution, for more than one golden opportunity offered for bald, barefaced breach of trust. One day in particular, he found himself in the street with thirty thousand dollars in his trousers' pocket. This not unprecedented situation derived its special significance from the fact that the day was the one fixed for Frances Lester's marriage. As Dirke walked up the street he saw, in fact, the carriages drawn up before Trinity Church, and he knew that the ceremony was going forward. He was struck with the dramatic possibilities of the moment. Were he to decamp on the spot, he might be in time to get into the morning papers, and Frances would know with what *éclat* he had celebrated her wedding day. He raised his hand to signal a

cab, but the driver did not see him, and ten minutes later the money had gone to swell his employers' bank-account. He had often questioned what would have been his next step, supposing that particular cab-driver had had his wits about him and seen the signal. He was loath to admit that he would merely have been at the expense of driving the few blocks to the same destination which he had reached more economically on foot !

He had returned in time to stand among the crowd on the sidewalk and see the bridal party issue from the church. When bride and bridegroom crossed the narrow space between the awning and the carriage door, Dirke had his first opportunity of seeing the Count de Lys. He could not but perceive that the man was the possessor of a high-bred, handsome face, but perhaps it was, under the circumstances, not altogether surprising that he found the handsome face detestable. The mere sight of the black moustache and imperial which the Frenchman wore so jauntily was enough to make the unhappy broker's clerk forswear all kindred ornaments to the end of his days.

A broker's clerk he did not long remain, however. He was too restless for that, too much at odds with the particular sort of life

his situation forced him into. Within a month of the day on which he had proved himself so signally unfitted for the *rôle* of rascal, he had thrown up his position and cut himself loose from all his old moorings. It was in a spirit of fantastic knight-errantry that he turned his face westward, a spirit that gave him no rest until, at the end of many months, he finally dropped anchor in the riotous little harbor of Lame Gulch. This turbulent haven seemed to promise every facility for the shipwreck on which he had so perversely set his heart, and he was content to wait there for whatever storm or collision should bring matters to a crisis. Perhaps the mere steady under-tow would suck him down to destruction. The under-tow is not inconsiderable among the seething currents of life in a two-year-old mining-camp.

Dirke had not been long in the camp, before his indefeasible air of integrity and respectability had attracted the attention of no less a personage than the proprietor of the roulette wheel, who invited him to run the wheel on a salary. It was now some three months since he had entered upon this vocation, and it had, on the whole, been a disappointment to him. He had accepted the position with an idea that he should be playing the sinister *rôle* of

tempter, that he should feel himself at last acting a very evil part. To his surprise and chagrin he found that he was conscious of no moral relation whatever with the victims of the wheel. It was not he who enticed them ; it was not he who impoverished them. On the contrary, given his contract with the "bank," he was doing his duty as simply and scrupulously here as in the Wall Street office, performing a certain function for certain pay, accountable to an employer now as hitherto. And, indeed, when he reflected upon the glimpses of Wall Street methods he had got, and upon the incalculable turns of the Wall Street wheel, whirling its creatures into opulence or penury as capriciously as the roulette wheel itself, he could not but feel that he was serving the same master now as heretofore, and to very much the same ends. And now, as heretofore, he had no reassuring sense of being on the downward path.

He used to amuse himself during the day,—for his time was his own from dawn to dark,—in trying to work out the law of averages, following out the hints he gathered from the working of the wheel. He had always had a taste for mathematics, having rather "gone in" for that branch at college. Fleeting visions of becom-

ing an astronomer had visited him from time to time ; but the paralysis of wealth had deterred him while he was yet ostensible master of his own fate, and now the same inherent weakness of character which had made him a slave to wealth, made him a slave to poverty, and he regarded whatever latent ambition he had ever cherished as a dead issue. His mind sometimes recurred to those neglected promptings of happier days, as he went forth under the stars after hours, and cleared his brain by a walk in the pure night air. It was his habit to make for the hills outside the camp, and his solitary wanderings were much cheered by the light of those heavenly lamps. At this high altitude they had a peculiar brilliance that seemed to give them a nearer, more urgent significance than elsewhere. He felt that it was inconsistent in him to look at the stars and to inquire into the law of averages. It would be more in character, he told himself,—that is, more in the character he aspired to—if he were to embrace the exceptional advantages Lame Gulch offered for doing something disreputable. Yet the stars shone down, undaunted and serene, upon the squalid camp, and into the bewildered soul of Dabney Dirke, so fantastically pledged to do violence

to its own nature. Sometimes they twinkled shrewdly, comprehendingly; sometimes they glowed with a steady splendor that seemed to dominate the world. There were nights when the separate stars were blended, to his apprehension, in one great symphony of meaning; again certain ones stood out among the others, individual and apart. There was Jupiter up there. He did not look as if he were revolving with lightning speed about the sun, and the moons revolving about him were not even visible. That was the kind of roulette wheel a man might really take an interest in! And while he dallied with the stars and with those higher promptings which their radiance symbolized, he yet clung persistently to the purely artificial bonds he had put upon himself.

Poor Dabney Dirke! If he had possessed the saving grace of humor he could not have dedicated the golden years of youth to anything so hopelessly chimerical and absurd. He would have perceived that he was enacting the part of an inverted Don Quixote; a character grotesque enough when planted on its own erratic legs, but hopelessly ridiculous when made to stand on its head and defy its windmills up-side-down. As it was, he continued to take himself seriously, and to argue with

himself on every concession made to a nature at bottom sound and well-inclined, if not well-balanced; and he was still standing at his incongruous post, performing its duties with dogged industry, when something happened which created a commotion within him. The man who had married Frances Lester came to Lame Gulch and gravitated, as every guest of the *Mountain Lion* is sure to do, for the passing moment at least, to the barroom of the house. The count was a member of a French syndicate engaged in the erection of a "stamp-mill" at Lame Gulch, and he was making a flying trip from the East with one of his compatriots, to take a look at the property. He was a man of medium height whose nationality and rank were equally unmistakable, and his air of distinction attracted no little attention upon his entrance. Dirke, however, did not see him. There was a throng of men about the wheel, and the "boss" was regarding their movements with the perfunctory attention which his duties required, when a hand, whiter than the others, was thrust forward. As it placed a silver dollar on the board a flash of diamonds caught Dirke's eye, and he recognized the "lucky ring" he had once worn. It was a closer fit for the little finger of the

present wearer than it had been for his own. There was little need of further investigation to establish the identity of the new-comer.

The wheel went round and the ball dropped in the stranger's favor. Dirke glanced at him as he pocketed his winnings. The handsome face antagonized him even more strongly than it had six months ago.

M. de Lys did not play again immediately. He watched the wheel with a quiet intentness, as if he were establishing some subtle, occult influence over it. Then the white hand was quietly extended, and a gold piece glittered where it had touched. Again the ball declared itself in favor of the Frenchman.

He played at intervals for more than an hour, with unvarying success. Eager, inexperienced boys rashly staked and often lost; laborers with haggard faces saw their earnings swept away; but the count, always calm and deliberate, won,—won repeatedly, invariably. He rarely risked more than ten dollars on a single turn; he never placed his money on a number. He played red or black, and the ball followed his color as the needle follows the magnet. Dirke began to dread the sight of that white hand; the gleam of the diamonds seemed to pierce and pain him like sharp steel.

An hour had passed and Dirke estimated that de Lys must have won several hundred dollars. Other men had begun to choose his color, and the "bank" was feeling the drain. Yet the machine itself was not more unconcerned than the "boss" appeared, as he paid out the money lost, and set the wheel spinning to new issues. Black, red,—red, black; so the ball fell, but always in favor of the white hand with the flashing brilliants. The group about the table was becoming excited; Dirke knew very well that if the thing went on much longer the "bank" would have to close down.

There was a moment's pause, while all waited to follow the stranger's lead. Then the white hand reached forward and placed four five-dollar gold pieces upon the red. A dozen gnarled and grimy hands swarmed like a flock of dingy birds above the board, and each one laid its coin upon the red. Round went the wheel; the ball sped swiftly in its groove. Then the speed slackened, the ball seemed to hesitate and waver like a sentient thing making choice; there was the light click of the drop; the "bank" had won.

After that the white hand played with varying luck, sometimes winning, sometimes losing. The other players began staking on their own

account again. And then, some time after midnight, de Lys began losing, as persistently, as uninterruptedly as he had won. He played as deliberately as before, with a something more of calculating intentness, but the charm was broken ; the wheel seemed to whirl with an intelligent revolt. Just as surely as the white hand placed a coin upon the black, the red had it ; just as certainly as the diamonds flashed above the red, the ball found its way into the black. The handsome face grew slightly strained and eager—so slightly that the change would have escaped the ordinary observer. For the first time Dirke found a satisfaction in the contemplation of those high-bred features. Silver, gold, banknotes,—each and all were swept into the coffers of the "bank." His losses must already exceed his winnings, Dirke thought. The thought animated him with a malignant joy. For the first time he felt an interest in the fall of the ball ; for the first time too, he felt the evil in his nature vibrate into life.

Three turns of the wheel had taken place with no appearance of the white hand upon the board. "Busted," had been the laconic comment of a by-stander. Dirke glanced at the count and their eyes met. The gambler

was fingering the "lucky ring." As he caught Dirke's eye he drew the ring from his finger.

"What will you place against that?" he asked, handing it over to the boss. His English was careful and correct, yet as Gallic as his face itself.

Dirke examined the ring judicially, wondering, the while, that it did not burn his fingers. The moment in which he last held it thus was far more vivid to his consciousness than the present instant and the present scene.

"Twenty-five dollars," he said, in his most official tone, as he returned the ring to its owner.

The wheel spun, the ring glittered on the red. The count leaned slightly forward. Dirke watched only the wheel. He had a wild notion that the result was life or death to him, yet why, he could not tell. Then the wheel slackened, the ball hesitated, paused, dropped. Black had won!

M. de Lys turned on his heel and left the table. An hour later the room was empty and the lights were out.

When Dirke passed through the office of the *Mountain Lion* and stepped out on the veranda, the night was far spent, but the deep June sky was still spangled with stars. He

stood for an instant at the top of the steps, hardly aware of the delicious wash of the night air on his face, which yet he paused to enjoy. There was a foot-fall close at hand and a voice.

"M. le croupier?" the voice queried.

He turned sharp about. The Frenchman stood there with his hat raised, a gentleman to the finger-tips. Involuntarily Dirke lifted his own hat, and lifted it after the manner of a gentleman. The manner was not lost upon the Frenchman.

"Monsieur," said the latter, courteously; "I had the misfortune to lose a ring this evening. I shall redeem it on the morrow, when I can command my resources."

The "boss" looked him full in the face. They could not distinguish one another's features in the starlight, yet the two personalities were as plainly in evidence as could have been the case in the broad light of day.

"No, you won't!" Dirke retorted, coolly, planting his hat firmly on his head again. He was angry with himself for having removed it.

"May I ask Monsieur why not?"

"Because the ring is sold!"

The Frenchman started visibly.

"And the purchaser? Would you have the courtesy to indicate to me the purchaser?"

"No!"

The rudely spoken monosyllable put an abrupt period to the conversation.

Dirke passed down the steps and along the deserted street. As he paced the length of the board sidewalk, which helped itself over the ups and downs of the ungraded thoroughfare by means of short, erratic flights of steps at certain points, he distinctly heard footsteps following. They sounded plainly on the plank walk, and he did not for a moment doubt whose they were. His hands were in his coat-pockets. On the little finger of his left hand was the ring.

He paused, opposite the brightly lighted windows of the last saloon in the row. The town ended there, the street lapsing into a rough and trackless barren. Here he waited for the Frenchman to come up with him. He watched his progress with a curious interest, noting how the figure was at one moment lost in the shadow, only to emerge, the next instant, into the full light that streamed from some nocturnal haunt. As he came up with Dirke, the electric light over the entrance to the saloon shone full upon them both.

Dirke waited for him to speak. Again he raised his hat, but this time Dirke was on his

guard and was not to be betrayed into any concession to courtesy. There was a slight shrug of the shoulders as the Frenchman replaced his hat. He spoke, however, in a conciliatory tone :

"It is a fine evening," he observed. "I have followed your example. I go for a walk."

"You have followed me, you mean," said Dirke, bluntly. "I heard you behind me."

Then, moved by a sudden impulse to precipitate matters, he drew his left hand from his pocket. The diamonds flashed in the light.

M. de Lys's eyes flashed in response. With all his unabated elegance, he had something the look of a tiger ready to spring upon his prey. But he held himself in check.

"Monsieur!" he cried, and there was a savage note in his voice, which Dirke would not have credited him with. "Monsieur! If you decline to permit me to pay for that ring to-morrow, I am ready to *fight* for it to-night!" He pronounced the word "*fight*" with a peculiar, hissing emphasis.

"Not to-night," Dirke rejoined quietly.

"And why not to-night, Monsieur, may I ask?"

"Because I am armed, and you are not."

At the word Dirke had drawn his right hand from his pocket ; the barrel of a pistol gleamed white between them.

The Frenchman recoiled. His face was not pleasant to look upon, yet his antagonist would have been sorry to lose the sight of it.

Dirke stood, tall and slim and commanding, his face set in the accustomed lines. No emotion whatever was to be seen there, not even contempt for the man who shrank from sure death in such a cause. For fully twenty seconds they faced each other in the glaring light of the saloon, pent up passion visible in the one, invisible in the other. In Dirke's face, and bearing, however, devoid as it was of any emotion, one quality was but the more recognizable for that, and the count knew that the man before him was available as an antagonist.

"Monsieur," he said, with strong self-control, "it is possible that you do not understand—that you are not aware—that—Monsieur! The ring which you are pleased to wear so—so—conspicuously is the property of— The ring, Monsieur, is sacred to me!"

"Sacred!" Dirke repeated. "Sacred!" The word was an arraignment, not to be overlooked.

"Monsieur!" the count cried.

"I was merely struck by your peculiar treatment of sacred things," Dirke replied, his tone dropping to the level of absolute indifference. "It is—unconventional, to say the least."

He lifted his hand and examined the ring with an air of newly aroused interest. He wondered, half-contemptuously, at the man's self-control.

"Monsieur," he heard him say. "You are a gentleman; I perceive it beneath the disguise of your vocation,—of your conduct. When I say to you that the sight of that ring upon your finger compromises my honor,—that it is an *insult* to me,—you comprehend; is it not so?"

"Quite so," Dirke replied, with carefully studied offensiveness.

"Then, Monsieur, it will perhaps be possible at another time to correct the inequality in point of arms to which you have called my attention." The challenge was admirably delivered.

"I should think nothing could be simpler," Dirke rejoined, and he deliberately put his pistol in his pocket.

They parted without more words, de Lys stumbling once as he made his way along the uneven sidewalk, Dirke keeping on across the barren upland, sure-footed and serene.

It had come at last, his great opportunity;

all the evil in his nature was roused at last; jealousy, vindictiveness, unscrupulousness. He gloated over his own iniquity; every feature of it rejoiced him. He had no moral right to that ring,—all the dearer his possession of it! This man had never injured him;—the more delicious his hatred of him. The Frenchman with his exasperating air of success was to him the insolent embodiment of that which had been wrongfully wrested from him, Dabney Dirke, who had as good a right to success as another. Some philanthropists, made such by prosperity and ease, spent their lives in trying to even things off by raising the condition of their fellow-creatures to their own. Well, he had the same object to be attained, by different means. He would even things off by grading to his own level. Was not that a perfectly logical aim, given the circumstances which induced it?

He lifted his hand and moved it to and fro, that he might catch the gleam of the stones in the faint starlight. In the mere joy of seeing the ring there upon his finger he almost forgot for the moment what its significance was. It scarcely reminded him just then of the girl with the tearful eyes, usually so present with him. Her face seemed to be receding from his

memory ; the whole story of his life seemed to grow dim and ill-defined. His mind was curiously elate with a sense of achievement, a certainty that he was near the goal, that fulfilment was at hand.

He was still pursuing his way up the hill, walking slowly, with bent head, like a philosopher in revery, when he became aware that the day was dawning. The stars were growing dim and vanishing one by one, in the pale light which came like a veil across their radiance. A dull, creeping regret invaded his mind. He had loved the stars, he could have studied them with joy ; under a happier fate he might have been high in their counsels. As he watched their obliteration in the dawn of a day deliberately dedicated to evil, a profound yearning for their pure tranquil eternal light came upon him, and as Jupiter himself withdrew into the impenetrable spaces, Dirke turned his eyes downward with a long, shuddering sigh. His downcast gaze fell upon the poor earthly brilliance of the diamonds.

It was not until he heard from the count, a few hours later, that Dirke found himself restored to the state of mind which he was pleased to consider natural. The call for action dissipated his misgivings, carried him

beyond the reach of doubts and regrets, gave him an assurance that Fate had at last ranged itself on his side. For even if duelling were not a peculiarly un-American institution, it is a mode of warfare of such refinement and elaborateness, as to be utterly foreign to the atmosphere of a mining-camp, and Dirke could only regard the challenge which came to him in due form and order that morning, as a special interposition of those darker powers which he had so long, and hitherto so vainly invoked. He went about his preparations for the meeting in an exaltation of spirit, such as he had never before experienced. Paradoxical as it may seem, absurd as it really was, he was sustained, uplifted, by the sense of immolating himself upon the altar of an ideal cause. He was about to do an ideally evil thing, to the accomplishment of an ideally evil end. Insane as this feeling was, it was his inspiration, and he felt himself, for the first time in his life, acting consistently, courageously, confidently.

The meeting took place on a remote, barren hillside, on the edge of a dead forest whose gaunt stems stood upright, or leaned against each other, a weird, unearthly company. As Dirke arrived with his second,—a saturnine Kentuckian, with a duelling record of

his own,—he glanced about the desolate spot thinking it well chosen. Only one feature of the scene struck him as incongruous. It was a prickly poppy standing there, erect and stiff, its coarse, harsh stem and leaves repellant enough, yet bearing on its crest a single flower, a wide white silken wonder, curiously at variance with the spirit of the scene. Dirke impatiently turned away from the contemplation of it, which had for an instant fascinated him, and faced, instead, the count, who was approaching from below, accompanied by his friend and countryman.

Shots were to be exchanged but once, and though the principals were both good shots, the seconds anticipated nothing serious. The count, for his part, was not desirous of killing his adversary, and he had no reason to suppose that the latter thirsted for his blood. He considered the incident which had led to this unpleasant situation as a mere freak on the part of this morose individual whom he had unfortunately run afoul of. He had, indeed, moments of wondering whether the man were quite in his right mind.

Dirke wore the ring, and he gloried in wearing it, as he took his place, elate, exultant, yet perfectly self-contained.

"Are you ready?" the Kentuckian asked, and the sense of being "ready" thrilled him through every nerve.

At the given signal, Dirke raised his pistol in deliberate, deadly aim. De Lys saw it, and a subtle change swept his face, while he instantly readjusted his own aim. In Dirke's countenance there was no change, no slightest trace of any emotion whatever. Yet both seconds perceived, in the flash of time allowed, that the combat was to be a mortal one, and that it was Dirke who had thus decreed it.

And then it was, in that crucial moment, that Dirke's groping soul came out into the light,—even as the wide white flower over yonder had come out into the light, springing from its grim, unsightly stem. In that flashing instant of time his true nature, which he had so long sought to belie, took final command. All that was false, fantastic, artificial, loosed its hold and fell away. For the first time in two years Dabney Dirke was perfectly sane.

At the word to fire, he did the one thing possible to the man he was; his pistol flashed straight upwards.

The two shots rang out simultaneously, setting the echoes roaring among the hills. Dirke staggered, but recovered his foothold

again and stood an instant, swaying slightly, while he slowly, with an absent look in his face and in his eyes, drew the ring from his finger. As de Lys came up, he dropped the trinket at his feet. Then, slowly, heavily, he sank back, and the men gently lowered him to the ground.

De Lys knelt beside him, white with consternation.

"Monsieur!" he cried; "Monsieur! It was a misunderstanding! I mistook you wholly! And you, you were magnanimous! Ah, *mon Dieu!*"

And then a wonder came to pass, for Dabney Dirke's lips parted in a smile. The smile was faint, yet indescribably sweet, and the voice was faint, and far-away, in which he murmured brokenly; "It was—a message—to—the stars."

The horror in the faces bending over him was lost in a look of awe. There was an influence mystically soothing in the dying man's words. The dry, soft air played about the group, rustling the short, sparse grass. It seemed the only motion left in a hushed and reverent world.

Then, as the smile deepened upon his face, fixed there by the hand of death, the lips parted for the last time, and Dirke whispered; "I am going —in—for astronomy!"

VIII.

MR. FETHERBEE'S ADVENTURE.

MR. FETHERBEE was in his element,—a fact which the casual observer would have found it hard to believe ; for he was a dapper little gentleman, dainty in his attire and presumably fastidious as to his surroundings, and these last were, in the present instance, hardly calculated to suit a fastidious taste. In a word, Mr. Fetherbee was "doing" Lame Gulch, doing it from the tourist's standpoint, delighting in every distinctive feature of the rough-and-ready, sordid, picturesque, "rustling" young mining-camp.

He was a popular little man, and he had been received with open arms, so to speak, by the Springtown contingent, when he had put in an appearance the day before at the *Mountain Lion*. He had arrived in a state of high good humor, induced by the stage ride from the railroad terminus, which he had accom-

plished, perched upon the topmost seat of the big "Concord," scraping acquaintance with a miscellaneous lot of pilgrims, all bound to the same conglomerate Mecca. Indeed, so charmed had he been with the manners and language of his fellow-passengers, that it is to be feared that he did but scant justice to the superb scenery spread out for the delectation of the traveller. There were moments, to be sure, when a line of gleaming snow-caps visible through the interstices of a tract of starveling trees would arrest his attention; yet the more moving and dramatic interest of some chance utterance in his immediate vicinity, was sure to recall him to a delighted contemplation of a rakish sombrero or of a doubtfully "diamond" scarf-pin. When, at last, the stage reached the edge of the sort of basin in which the camp lies, and began the descent of the last declivity, he could scarcely contain himself for sheer joy. What, to him, were the glories of the encircling peaks, the unfolding wonders of this heart of the Rockies, compared with the actual sight of the mushroom growth of pine huts and canvas tents, straggling sparsely up the hill, centring closely in the valley? Children and dogs tumbled over each other on the barren slope which looked like one vast

back yard ; donkeys grazed there, apparently fattening upon a rich diet of tin cans and shavings. Over yonder was a charred heap which had once been a building of some pretension, as was evident from the rude stone foundation which the blackened timbers leaned against. So Lame Gulch had its history, its traditions, its ruin. The charred timbers already looked older than the everlasting hills that towered on every hand, wrapped in the garment of eternal youth.

"What a lot of houses there are here," Mr. Fetherbee remarked to his next neighbor, a seamy old reprobate with an evil eye.

"Hm!" was the reply, the articulate profanity of which was lost in a cloud of the thickest, vilest tobacco smoke. "Ever seen a mining-camp when the stuff 's given out?"

"No ; what does it look like?"

"Like a heap of bloomin' peanut-shells chucked in a corner."

At the *Mountain Lion* were Allery Jones, Harry de Luce, Dick Dayton "the mascot," and half a dozen other Springtown men, and they pounced upon the new-comer with every flattering indication of delight.

Mr. Fetherbee had been but six months a resident of Springtown, but it had hardly taken

as many days for Springtown to make the discovery that he was the king of story-tellers. He and his wife had taken up their residence in that most delightful of health resorts, and, having definitively closed up his affairs in the East, he had entered upon the Western life with keen zest. In one particular only he was apparently destined here as elsewhere to the disappointment which had dogged his footsteps from childhood up. Fortune had treated him kindly in many respects; she had given him health and prosperity, she had bestowed upon him a host of friends, and the wife of his choice,—a choice which fifteen years of rather exceptional happiness had amply justified,—best of all, he was endowed with an unfailing relish for these blessings: yet in the one burning desire of his heart he had been persistently frustrated. He had never had an adventure.

Men he knew had found this crowning bliss ready to their hand. There was his old chum, Jack Somers, who had been actually shipwrecked among the Azores; there was Caleb Fitz who had once stopped a runaway horse and saved the lives of two beauteous ladies, getting a corresponding number of his own ribs broken into the bargain; lucky dog! There was that miserable little cad, Sandy Seakum,

who had been in Boston at the big fire of '72, and had done something he was forever bragging about in the way of saving a lot of bonds and other securities belonging to his father-in-law. But for Mr. Fetherbee there had been no such honors. He had never met so much as a savage dog; the very burglars had declined to concern themselves with his house; and once when the top story of a hotel he was sleeping in had caught fire, and prodigies of valor were performed in the rescue of the inmates under the roof, he had disgraced himself irretrievably in his own eyes by sleeping through the night unconscious of any disturbance. It was perhaps this unsatisfied craving for adventures of his own which gave such a vivid coloring to his anecdotes of other men's exploits; possibly too, his sense of humor, which had an entirely individual flavor, had been quickened by a sly appreciation of his own oddities.

On the evening of his arrival at Lame Gulch, Mr. Fetherbee had outdone himself. He had sat, the centre of an appreciative group, in the corner of the big office, well away from the roaring wood fire, his chair tilted back against the wall, his hat on the back of his head, spouting entertainment in an uninterrupted stream. Not that Mr. Fetherbee was in the

habit of tilting his chair back, or, for the matter of that, of wearing his hat on the back of his head. But here, at Lame Gulch, he felt it incumbent upon him to enter as far as was practicable into the spirit of the piece. As he sat, enveloped in smoke and surrounded by the familiar forms of his Springtown cronies, he was obliged to admit that the "piece" in question had not yet developed much action. Yet the atmosphere was electric with possibilities, and the stage was well peopled with "characters," not one of which escaped the watchful eye of Mr. Fetherbee. A "character" he would have defined as a picturesque and lawless being, given to claim-jumping, murder, and all ungodliness; these qualities finding expression in a countenance at once fascinating and forbidding, a bearing at once stealthy and imperious. If no single one of the slouching, dark-browed apparitions that crossed his vision could be said to fulfil all these requirements, the indications scattered among them were sufficiently suggestive to have an exhilarating effect upon the genial little story-teller.

And now it was morning and the serious business of the day had begun. He was off for "the mines" with Dick Dayton, Allery Jones, and Frank Discombe,—a young mining

engineer who was far more proud of his attainments as "Jehu," than of his really brilliant professional reputation. They rattled noisily along the main street of the camp in a loose-jointed vehicle drawn by two ambitious steeds which Allery Jones characterized as "fiery skeletons." It was a glorious September morning, and though there had been a heavy frost in the night, the sensitive mountain air was already, two or three hours after sunrise, warmed and mellowed through and through. The road soon began to rise, taking a fine sweep about the shoulder of Bear Mountain, and then making its way over obstacles of a pronounced nature, through a very poor and peakèd "virgin forest." The wood-cutter had hacked his way right and left, combining a quest for firewood with his efforts in the service of the road-builder, scorning to remove stumps and roots, delighting in sharp corners and meaningless digressions. The horses struggled gallantly on, sometimes marching like a sculptor's creation, elevated on a huge pedestal of rock above the wagon which grovelled behind, its wheels sunk to their hubs in the ruts on either side ;—sometimes plunging into unexpected depressions, which brought their backs below the level of the dasher. The

wheels made their individual way as best they could, without the slightest reference to one another. At one moment Mr. Fetherbee perched with Dayton on the larboard end of the rear axle-tree; a moment later he found himself obliterated beneath the burly form of the latter, whom the exigencies of mountain travel had flung to the starboard side. Released from Dayton's crushing weight, his small person jounced freely about, or came butting against Discombe's back in the most spontaneous manner possible. The threatened dislocation of his joints, the imminent cracking of all his bones, the squeezing of his small person between the upper and the nether millstones of Dayton's portly form and the adamantine seat-cushions; each and every incident of the transit Mr. Fetherbee took in perfectly good part. Yet it may be questioned whether he would have arrived at the goal intact, had it not been for the timely splitting of an under-pinning of the wagon, which caused a sudden collapse in the bows of the storm-tossed bark, and obliged the travellers to descend while yet half a mile distant from their journey's end.

The drive had been a silent function, each man having been pre-occupied with the effort

to preserve the integrity of his physical structure. Once on their feet, a splashed and battered company, they observed one another critically, bursting into shouts of unrestrained mirth over the astonishing hieroglyphics of mud which had inscribed themselves upon their respective countenances. Mr. Fetherbee himself looked like an Indian brave in full war-paint.

The day thus pleasantly begun was one of divers experiences, any one of which seemed to contain within itself all the essential elements of an adventure. More than once Mr. Fetherbee felt, as he jocosely expressed it, as if every minute would be the next! Thanks to Discombe's commanding position as superintendent of several of the mines, they were able to investigate the situation pretty thoroughly. They climbed up and down ladders, regardless of the wear and tear upon their breathing apparatus, they hailed the discovery of "free gold" in a bit of ore with as much enthusiasm as if they had been able to distinguish the microscopic speck which was agitating the minds of foreman and superintendent. Into one mine they descended, two passengers at a time, standing on the edge of a huge ore-bucket, which was gently lowered down the shaft. It was a treat to see the gnomelike figure of Mr.

Fetherbee poking about among the rocky ribs of Mother Earth, closely attended by the flickering lights and weird shadows cast by the tallow-dip with which he had prudently provided himself early in the day. Emerging into the light of heaven they all rested for a while, sprawling there upon the sun-baked hillside, looking down into a quiet wooded valley full of brooding sunshine and heavenly shadows, while their ears were filled with the din of the ore-bucket, restored to its legitimate function, rattling up the shaft and sending its contents crashing down into the dump.

There was but one moment of the day when Mr. Fetherbee's spirit quailed. His kind friends, anxious that he should miss no feature of "local coloring" had thoughtfully conducted him to the very worst of the miner's boarding-houses, where they all cheerfully partook of strange and direful viands for his sake. Mr. Fetherbee, shrewdly suspecting the true state of the case, had unflinchingly devoured everything that was set before him, topping off his gastronomic martyrdom with a section of apricot pie, of a peculiar consistency and a really poignant flavor. Just as he had swallowed the last mouthful, the proprietor of "The Jolly Delvers" came up, and Mr.

Fetherbee, in the first flush of victory, remarked: "Well, sir! That *is* a pie, and no mistake!" Upon which the host, charmed with this spontaneous tribute, hastened to set before his guest another slice. And then it was that Mr. Fetherbee, but now so unflinching, so imperturbable, laid down his weapons and struck his colors. He eyed the pie, he eyed his delighted fellow-sufferers, and then, in a voice grown suddenly plaintive, he said: "Don't tempt me, sir! It would be against my doctor's orders!"

But even the memory of his discomfiture could not long check the flow of Mr. Fetherbee's spirits, and ten minutes later the valiant little trencher-man was climbing with cheerful alacrity into the wagon, which had been, in the interim, subjected to a judicious application of ropes and wires.

"Think she 's quite seaworthy?" he asked, as the structure groaned and "gave" under his light weight.

"Guess she 'll weather it," Discombe growled between his teeth which were closed upon the stem of his pipe. "If she does n't, there 'll be a circus!"

"Waves likely to be as high as they were this morning?"

"No; it 's a kind of a double back-action slant we 've got to tackle this time," and off they rattled, even more musically than before, by reason of the late repairs.

Over the brow of the mountain they went, and down on the other side. For some fifteen minutes they rumbled along so smoothly that the insatiate Mr. Fetherbee experienced a gnawing sense of disappointment and feared that the fun was really over. But presently, without much warning, the road made a sharp curve and began pitching downward in the most headlong manner, taking on at the same time a sharp lateral slant. The brake creaked, and screamed, the wheels scraped and wabbled in their loose-jointed fashion, the horses, almost on their haunches, gave up their usual mode of locomotion, and coasted unceremoniously along, their four feet gathered together in a rigid protest.

"Do you often come this way?" asked Mr. Fetherbee, in a disengaged manner.

"Well, no;" Discombe replied, composedly. "This is my first trip. They sometimes haul the ore down here on a sort of drag, but I guess these are the first wheels that ever—— I say, fellows, you 'd better get out and hang on. She 's slipping!"

In an instant all but Discombe had sprung out, and seizing the side of the wagon, or the spokes of the stiff front wheel, in fact anything they could lay hands on, hung on to the endangered craft like grim fate, while Discombe, standing on the step, held the horses up by main force. There were moments when the longed-for adventure seemed imminent, and Mr. Fetherbee's spirits rose. He had quite made up his mind that if the wagon went over he should go with it, go with it into "kingdom come" rather than let go! He wondered whether he should be able to do the situation justice when he got home. It was a pity that Louisa could not see them with her own eyes! Though, on second thoughts, he was afraid he did not present a very dignified appearance, and if Louisa had a weakness, it consisted in the fact that she made a fetich of dignity, especially where her vivacious husband was concerned.

Meanwhile the ground was receding more and more rapidly under his sliding, stumbling feet, and his eyes were full of sand. Dayton and Allery Jones were frankly puffing and groaning, but Mr. Fetherbee scorned to make any such concession to circumstances. He was wondering whether his gait would be

permanently out of kilter after this complicated and violent scramble, when he became aware that the lateral slant was gradually lessening. A moment later he and his two companions had loosed their hold and stood stretching and rubbing themselves, while the wagon, under Discombe's pilotage, continued on its way, scooping the horses down the hill at an increasing rate of speed. Just above where they were standing, was a shed-like structure which looked much the worse for wind and weather.

"That 's the old shaft of the "Coreopsis," Dayton remarked.

"So it is," said Jones. "Harry de Luce went down on the rope the other day."

"How do you do it?" asked Mr. Fetherbee, much interested.

"Hand over hand, I suppose; or else you just let her slide. De Luce went down like a monkey."

"He must have come up like a monkey! I don't see how he did it!"

"He did n't come up; he went out by the tunnel. It would take more than a monkey to go up three hundred feet on a slack rope, or thirty feet either, for the matter of that."

As Mr. Fetherbee stood mopping his brow,

thereby spreading a cake of mud which he had unsuspectingly worn since morning, in a genial pattern over his right temple, a consuming ambition seized him.

"Now that 's something I should like to do," he declared. "Anything to prevent?"

"Why, no; not if you 're up to that kind of thing. They 're doing it every day."

"Why don't you go down that way now?" Dayton asked. "We shall be driving right by the tunnel in an hour or two, and can pick you up."

By this time they had effected an entrance into the shed, the door of which was securely locked, while the boards of one entire side of the tumble-down structure swung in at a touch. The three men stood looking down the pitch black hole into which the rope disappeared.

"Looks kind of pokey, does n't it?" said Allery Jones. "Think you 'd better try it, Fetherbee?"

For answer, Mr. Fetherbee seized the lightly swinging rope with both hands, twisted one leg about it and slid gaily from sight.

"*Bon voyage!*" called Dayton, down the inky shaft.

"*Yage!*" came a hollow voice from the

reverberating depths. They felt of the rope which was taut and firm.

"He's all right," said Dayton. "There's not enough of him to get hurt," and he squeezed his portly person out between the flapping boards.

"All the same, I shall be glad to see him again," Jones declared, with an anxious frown upon his usually *nonchalant* countenance; and the two men started briskly down the hill in pursuit of "the team."

Meanwhile, Mr. Fetherbee was making his way slowly and cautiously down the rope. It was a good stout one and he had no real misgivings. Yet the situation was unusual enough to have a piquant flavor. In the first place the darkness was more than inky in character, the kind of blackness in comparison with which the blackest night seems luminous. Then there was the peculiar quality of the air, so different from anything above ground, that the words chill, and dampness, had no special relation to it. In the strange, tomb-like silence, his own breath, his own movements, waked a ghostly, whispering echo which was extremely weird and suggestive. Mr. Fetherbee was enchanted. He felt that he was getting down into the mysterious heart of things; that he was

having something which came within an ace of being an adventure. Then, as he felt his way down, farther and farther below the vain surface of things, that intervening ace vanished, and he came up against his adventure with a suddenness that sent a knife-like thrill to his heart. His foot had lost its hold of the rope; he was hanging by his hands only.

Startled into what he condemned as an unreasoning agitation, he began describing a circle with his leg, searching for the lost rope. It must be there, of course; why, of course it must! He had certainly not gone more than fifty or sixty feet, and they had said something about three hundred feet? Where could the rope be? It must have got caught somehow on his coat! Or perhaps his right leg was getting numb and he could not feel anything with it. But no! His leg was all right. He felt out with his left leg. It did not even touch the wall of the shaft. There seemed to be nothing there, nothing at all! Nothing there? Nothing in all the universe, but this bit of rope he was clutching, and himself, a miserable little lump of quivering, straining nerves.

Mr. Fetherbee told himself that this would never do. He loosed the grip of his left hand,

and it felt its way slowly down the rope gathering it up inch by inch. He knew by the lightness of the rope that the end was there, yet when he touched it a shiver went through him. A second later the left hand was clutching the rope beside the right, and he had taken a long breath of,—was it relief? Relief from uncertainty, at least. He knew with a positive knowledge that there was but one outcome for the situation. It would be an hour at the very least before his friends reached the tunnel, for Discombe had business to attend to on the way. Even then they might not conclude immediately that anything was amiss. The break in the rope must be recent. It was possible that no one in the mine had discovered it. The old shaft was never used now-a-days, except for just such chance excursions as his. One thing was sure,—he could never hold out an hour. Already his wrists were weakening; he was getting chilled too, now that motion had ceased. He gave himself twenty minutes at the most, and then?—Hm! He wondered what it would be like! He had heard that people falling from a great height had the breath knocked out of them before they—arrived! He was afraid three hundred feet was not high enough for that! What a pity the shaft was not a

thousand feet deep! What a pity it had any bottom at all!

"I should have liked a chance to tell Louisa," he said aloud, with a short, nervous laugh, and then,—he was himself again.

To say that Mr. Fetherbee was himself again is to say that he was a self-possessed and plucky little gentleman,—the same gallant little gentleman, dangling here at the end of a rope, with the steady, irresistible force of gravitation pulling him to his doom, as he had ever been in his gay, debonair progress through a safe and friendly world. He forced his thoughts away from the horror to come. His imagination could be kept out of that yawning horror, though his body must be inevitably drawn down into it as by a thousand clutching hands. He forced his thoughts back to the pleasant, prosperous life he had led; to the agreeable people he had known; and most tenderly, most warmly, he thought of Louisa,—Louisa, so kind, so sympathetic, so companionable.

"Louisa," he had said to her one day, "I not only love you, but I like you." Well, so it had been with his life, that pleasant life of his. He not only loved it but he liked it! As he looked back over its course, in a spirit of calm contemplation, the achievement of which

he did not consider in the least heroic, he came to the deliberate conclusion that he had had his share. After a little more consideration his mind, with but a quickly suppressed recoil, adopted the conviction that it was perhaps better to go suddenly like this, than to have been subjected to a long, lingering illness.

His wrists were becoming more and more weak and shaky, and there was a sense of emptiness within him, natural perhaps, considering the quality of his noon-day meal. His thoughts began to hover, with a curious bitterness over the memory of that apricot pie. It was the one thing that interfered with the even tenor of his philosophical reflections. The most singular resentment toward it had taken possession of his mind.

"Look here," he said to himself; "I 'll get my mind clear of that confounded pie, and then I 'll drop and have done with it." He knew very well that he could not keep his hold two minutes longer, and he was determined to "die game."

For a few seconds Mr. Fetherbee very nearly lost his mental grip. It seemed to be loosening, loosening, just as his fingers were doing. Then, as in a sort of trance, there rose before him a visible picture of the pleasant, kindly

face he had so warmly loved, so heartily liked. Still in a trance-like condition, he became aware that that was the impression he would like to carry with him into eternity. He let it sink quietly into his soul, a soothing, fortifying draught; then, unconscious of philosophy, of heroism, of whatever we may choose to call the calm acceptance of the inevitable, he loosed his hold.

He fell of course only three inches. Anybody might have foreseen it, anybody, that is, who had not been suspended at the end of a rope in a pitch black hole. There is, however, something more convincing in experience than in anything else, and, as we have seen, Mr. Fetherbee had not once thought of the possibility of a friendly platform close beneath his feet. The discovery of it was none the less exhilarating. He did not in the least understand it, but he was entirely ready to believe in it.

He promptly pulled out his match-box and the bit of candle he was provided with. The dim, uncertain light cheered and warmed his very soul.

He found himself standing on a broad stout plank, built securely across the shaft. From the under side of this plank hung a rope like the one gently swaying before his eyes. He

was saved; and as he breathed something very like a prayer of thanksgiving, it suddenly struck him that he had escaped not only an untimely, but an undignified end. "I 'm glad I have n't done anything to mortify Louisa," he said to himself, and he felt that he had not until that moment appreciated his good fortune!

He looked at his watch. It was nearly half-an-hour since he had entered the mine. He stamped his feet on the plank and rubbed his hands together to get up the circulation, and then he pulled out a cigar and lighted it. The first whiff permeated his being with a sense as of food and drink, sunshine and sweet air.

The rest of the descent was accomplished by means of a succession of ropes suspended from a succession of platforms.

An hour later, when the wagon drove up to the mouth of the tunnel, Mr. Fetherbee was found standing serenely there, with a half finished cigar between his lips, gazing abstractedly at the landscape.

"Hullo, Fetherbee!" Dayton sung out, as they approached. "How was it?"

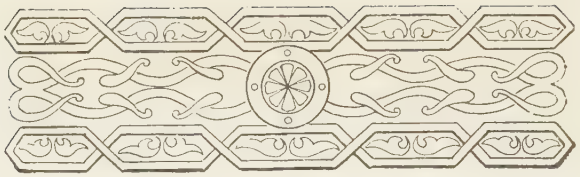
"First rate!" came the answer, in a voice of suppressed elation, which Allery Jones noted and was at something of a loss to interpret.

"Was it all your fancy pictured?" he asked, in rather a sceptical tone.

"All and more!" Mr. Fetherbee declared.

He mounted into the wagon, and the horses started on the home-stretch, not more joyful in the near prospect of their well-earned orgie of oats and hay than Mr. Fetherbee in the feast of narration which was spread for him. Finding it impossible to contain himself another moment, he cried, with an exultant ring in his voice: "But I say, you fellows! *I 've had an adventure!*"

Then, as they bowled along through a winding valley in which the early September twilight was fast deepening, Mr. Fetherbee gave his initial version of what has since become a classic, known among the ever-increasing circle of Mr. Fetherbee's friends as—"An adventure I once had!"



IX.

AN AMATEUR GAMBLE.

THE mining boom was on, and Springtown, that famous Colorado health-resort and paradise of idlers, was wide awake to the situation. The few rods of sidewalk which might fairly be called "the street," was thronged all day with eager speculators. Everybody was "in it," from the pillars of society down to the slenderest reed of an errand boy who could scrape together ten dollars for a ten-cent stock. As a natural consequence real estate was, for the moment, as flat as a poor joke, and people who had put their money into town "additions" were beginning to think seriously of planting potatoes where they had once dreamed of rearing marketable dwelling-houses.

Hillerton, the oldest real-estate man in town, was one of the few among the fraternity who had not branched out into stock brokerage.

For that reason an air of leisure pervaded his office, and men liked to gather there and discuss the prospects of Lame Gulch. Lame Gulch, as everybody knows, is the new Colorado mining-camp, which is destined eventually to make gold a drug in the market. The camp is just on the other side of the Peak, easily accessible to any Springtown man who is not afraid of roughing it. And to do them justice, there proved to be scarcely an invalid or a college-graduate among them all who did not make his way up there, and take his first taste of hardship like a man.

Hillerton used to sit behind the balustrade which divided his sanctum from the main office, and listen with an astute expression, and just the glimmer of a smile, to the talk of the incipient millionaires, who bragged with such ease and fluency of this or that Bonanza. When all declared with one accord that "if Lame Gulch panned out as it was dead sure to do, Springtown would be the biggest *little* town in all creation," Hillerton's smile became slightly accentuated, but a wintry chill of incredulity had a neutralizing effect upon it. As the excitement increased, and his fellow-townsmen manifested a willingness to mortgage every inch of wood and plaster in their possession,

Hillerton merely became, if possible, more stringent in the matter of securities.

"We might as well take a mortgage on the town, and done with it," he remarked to his confidential clerk one Saturday evening. "We shall own it all in six months, anyhow!"

Peckham, the confidential clerk, shrugged his shoulders, and said he "guessed it was about so."

Hillerton's confidential clerk usually assented to the dictum of his principal. It saved trouble and hurt nobody. Not that Lewis Peckham was without opinions of his own; but he took no special interest in them, and rarely put himself to the trouble of defending them.

The young man's countenance had never been an expressive one, and during the three years he had spent in Hillerton's employ, his face had lost what little mobility it had ever possessed. He was a pale, hollow-chested individual, with a bulging forehead, curiously marked eyebrows, and a prominent and sensitive nose. A gentleman, too, as anybody could see, but a gentleman of a singularly unsocial disposition. He looked ten years older than he was—an advantage which Hillerton recognized. His grave, unencouraging manner had

a restraining effect upon too exacting tenants; while his actual youthfulness gave Hillerton the advantage over him of thirty years' seniority. Altogether Hillerton placed a high value upon his confidential clerk, and it was with a very genuine good-will that he followed up the last recorded observation, by saying, carelessly:

"I hope you 've kept out of the thing yourself, Peckham."

"Oh, yes!" Peckham answered, in a tone of indifference, copied after Hillerton's own.

Peckham spoke the truth, as it happened, but he would probably have made the same answer whether it had been true or not. He was of the opinion that he was not accountable to Hillerton nor to any one else in the disposition he might make of his legitimate earnings. In fact, it was largely owing to Hillerton's inquiry and the hint of resentment it excited, that Peckham put a hundred dollars into the Yankee Doodle Mining and Milling Co. that very day. To be sure, he acted on a "straight tip," but straight tips were as thick as huckleberries in Springtown, and this was the first time he had availed himself of one.

It would be difficult to imagine why Peckham should not have thoroughly liked Hillerton;

difficult, that is, to any one not aware of the unusual criterion by which he measured his fellow men. He was himself conscious that he had ceased to "take any stock" in his employer, since the day on which he had discovered that that excellent man of business did not know the Ninth Symphony from Hail Columbia.

Against Fate, on the other hand, Peckham had several grudges. He was inconveniently poor, he was ill, and he was in exile. With so many hard feelings to cherish against his two immediate superiors—namely, Hillerton and Fate—it is no wonder that Peckham had the reputation of being of a morose disposition.

He was perhaps the most solitary man in Springtown. Not only did he live in lodgings, and pick up his meals at cheap restaurants; he had wilfully denied himself the compensations which club life offers. Living, too, in a singularly hospitable community, he never put himself in the way of receiving invitations, and he consequently was allowed to do without them. He did not keep a horse; he thought a lodging-house no place for dogs, and he entertained serious thoughts of shooting his landlady's cat. He had always refrained from burdening himself with correspondents, and

would have thought it a nuisance to write to his own brother, if so be he had had such a relative to bless himself with.

Lewis Peckham did not complain of his lot in detail, and he never made the least effort to better it. There was only one thing he really wanted, and that thing he could not have. He wanted to be "something big" in the way of a musician. Not merely to be master of this or that instrument; certainly not to teach reluctant young people their scales and arpeggios. What he had intended to become was a great composer—a composer of symphonies and operas—the First Great American Composer, spelled, be it observed, with capital letters. He was not destined to the disillusionment of direct failure, which in all human probability would have been his. Fate spared him that by visiting him in the beginning of his career with an attack of pneumonia which sent him fleeing for his life to the sunshine and high air of the Rocky Mountain region. Peckham was always rather ashamed of having fled for his life, which, as he repeatedly assured himself, was by no means worth the purchase. Yet with him as with most men, even when thwarted in what they believe to be a great ambition, the instinct of life is as imperative

as that of hunger. And Lewis Peckham found himself wooing health at the cost of music, and earning his living as prosaically as any mere bread-winner of them all.

The "straight tip" on the Yankee Doodle proved to be an exception among its kind. The Y. D. which he had bought at ten cents, ran up in a week to twenty-five cents. Peckham sold out just before it dropped back, and then he put his profits into the "Libby Carew."

It happened that about that time he read in the local paper that the great Leitmann Orchestra would close its season with a concert in Chicago on May 16th. This concert Peckham was determined to hear, cost what it would. Hence the prudence which led him to reserve his original hundred dollars; a prudence which would otherwise have deprived the speculation of half its savor. The Libby Carew was as yet a mere "hole in the ground," but if he did not have the excitement of making money, it might prove equally stirring to lose it. Besides that, Hillerton's tone was getting more and more lofty on the subject of stock gambling, and the idea of acting contrary to such unquestioned sagacity had more relish than most ideas possessed.

Meanwhile the excitement grew. Lame

Gulch was "panning out" with startling results. One after another the Springtown men went up to investigate matters for themselves, and the most sceptical came back a convert. The railroad folks began to talk of building a branch "in." Eastern capitalists pricked up their ears and sent out experts.

One morning the last of February, half-a-dozen men, among them a couple who had just come down from the camp, stood about Hillerton's office or sat on the railing of the sanctum, giving rough but graphic accounts of the sights to be seen at Lame Gulch. The company was not a typical Western crowd. The men were nearly all well dressed and exhibited evidences of good breeding. The refinement of the "tenderfoot" was still discernible, and excepting for the riding boots which they wore and the silk hats and derbys which they did not wear, and for an air of cheerful alertness which prevailed among them, one might have taken them for a group of Eastern club men. The reason of this was not far to seek. Most of them were, in fact, Eastern club men, who had sought Springtown as a health-resort, and had discovered, to their surprise, that it was about the pleasantest place they had yet "struck."

Peckham sat somewhat apart from the others on his high revolving stool, sometimes listening, without a sign of interest in his face, sometimes twirling his stool around and sitting with his back to the company, apparently immersed in figures.

Allery Jones, the Springtown wag, had once remarked that Peckham's back was more expressive than his face. On this occasion he nudged Dicky Simmons, with a view to reminding him of the fact; but Dicky, a handsome youth with a sanguine light in his blue eyes, was intent on what Harry de Luce was saying.

"Tell you what!" cried de Luce, who had only recently discovered that there were other interests in life besides the three P's, polo, poker, and pigeon-shooting. "Tell you what, those fellows up there are a rustling lot. Take the Cosmopolitan Hotel now! They 're getting things down to a fine point in that tavern. There was a man put up there night before last, one of those rich-as-thunder New York capitalists. You could see it by the hang of his coat-tails. He came sniffing round on his own hook, as those cautious cusses do. Well, Rumsey gave him one of his crack rooms—panes of glass in the window, imitation ma-

hogany chamber-set, pitcher of water on the washstand, all complete. Do you suppose that was good enough for old Money-Bags? Not by a jug-full. He owned the earth, he 'd have you to know, and he was n't going to put up with anything short of the Murray Hill! Nothing suited. There was n't any paper on the walls, there was n't any carpet on the floor, there was n't any window-shade, and I 'll be blowed if the old chap did n't object to finding the water frozen solid in the pitcher. He came down to the bar roaring-mad, and said he would n't stand it; he 'd rather camp out and done with it; if they could n't give him a better room than that, he 'd be out of this quicker 'n he came in! Well, fellers! You never saw anything half so sweet as that old halibut Rumsey. If the gentleman would just step in to supper and have a little patience, he thought he 'd find everything to his satisfaction. And by the living Jingo, boys! when old Money-Bags went up to his room in the middle of the evening, I 'm blessed if there was n't a paper on the wall, an ingrain carpet on the floor, and a red-hot stove over in the corner! Same room, too! Like to have seen the old boy when the grand transformation scene burst upon his astonished optics! Guess he thought

Lame Gulch could give New York City points!"

"Did the old cove seem likely to put any money in?" asked a man with high cheek-bones, who had the worried look of a person who has given a mortgage on his peace of mind.

"Yes, he bought up some claims dirt cheap, and they say he's going to form a company."

"That's the talk!" cried the sanguine Dicky.

"Speaking of picking up claims dirt cheap," began a new orator, an ex-ranchman, who was soon to make the discovery that there was as much money to be lost in mines as in cattle, if a fellow only had the knack; "I saw a tidy little deal when I was up at the camp last week. We were sitting round in the bar-room of the Cosmopolitan, trying to keep warm. I guess it was the only place in Lame Gulch that night where the thermometer was above zero. There was a lot of drinking going on, and the men that were playing were playing high. I was n't in it myself. I was pleasantly occupied with feeling warm after having fooled round the Libby Carew all day. I got interested in a man standing outside, who kept looking in at the window and going off again. The light

struck the face in a queer sort of way, and I guess there was something wrong about the window-pane. They don't do much business in the way of plate-glass at Lame Gulch. Anyhow, I could n't seem to get a fair sight of anything but the man's eyes, and they looked like the eyes of a hungry wolf."

"Ever meet a hungry wolf, Phil?"

"Scores of 'em. You 're one yourself, Jim, when you look at the stock-boards. Well! The fellow came and went like an angel visitant, and after awhile I got tired of watching for him, and found myself admiring the vocabulary of the boys as they got excited. Gad! It's a liberal education to listen to that sort of a crowd. The worst you can do yourself sounds like a Sunday-school address by comparison. Suddenly the door opened and in walked the man with the eyes. He had n't any overcoat on and his feet and legs were tied up in gunny sacks. His teeth were chattering and his face looked like a blue print! He shuffled up to Rumsey, who was sipping a cocktail behind the bar, and says he:

"'Evenin', pard; I want a drink.'

"'All right, stranger. Just show us the color of your money.'

"'Ain't got any money,' says he, 'but I 've

got a claim over 'long side of the Yankee Doodle, and I 'm ready to swap a half interest in it for all the liquor I can drink between now and morning.' There was a kind of a desperate look about the man that meant business. Rumsey stepped out among the boys and got a pointer or two on that claim, and they made the deal."

There was a pause in the narrative, to allow the listeners to take in the situation, and then the speaker went on: "It was a sight to see that chap pour the stuff down his throat. He was drinking, off and on, pretty much all night. Did n't come to till late the next afternoon. Rumsey was so pleased with the deal next morning, that he let the fellow lie behind the stove all day and sleep it off. Not sure but that he gave him a drink of water when he woke up, and water 's high at Lame Gulch."

"Kind of a shame, I call it, to let him do it. Was n't there anybody to stand treat?" It was Dicky, the lad of the sanguine countenance that spoke.

"Wonder what the claim was worth?" said the man with a mortgage on him.

"Wonder how he felt next morning?" queried another.

"Felt like an infernal donkey!" Hillerton

declared, flinging away a cigar-stump and taking his legs down from the desk.

Then Peckham turned himself round to face the crowd, and said, in a tone of quiet conviction :

"The man was all right. If you only want anything bad enough, no price is too high to pay for it."

This was a sentiment which every one was bound to respect—every one, at least, excepting Hillerton.

"Sounds very well, Peckham," he said, "but it won't hold water."

The most surprising thing about Peckham's little speculations was that they all succeeded. It made the other men rather mad because he did not care more.

"But that's always the way," Freddy Dillingham remarked, with an air of profound philosophy. "It 's the fellers that don't care a darn that have all the luck."

When Peckham sold out of the Libby Carew, he doubled his money, and the moment he touched the "Trailing Arbutus;" up she went. By the first of May he found himself the possessor of nearly three thousand dollars' worth of "stuff" distributed among several ventures. Of course, he was credited with five

times as much, and the other men began to think that if he did not set up a dogcart pretty soon, or at least a yellow buckboard, they should have their opinion of him. If the truth must be known, Peckham would not have given a nickle for a dozen dogcarts. It was all very well to make a little money ; it was the first time he had discovered a taste for anything in the nature of a game, and the higher the stakes came to be, the more worth while it seemed. Nevertheless, his mind, in those days of early May, when he was steadily rising in the esteem of his associates, was very little occupied with the calculation of his profits.

He had long since arranged with Hillerton to take part of his vacation the middle of May, and the anticipation of that concert was more inspiring to him than all the gold mines in Colorado. As the time drew near, a consuming thirst took possession of him, and not a gambler of them all was the prey to a more feverish impatience than he. He tormented himself with thoughts of every possible disaster which might come to thwart him at the last minute. Visions of a railroad accident which should result in the wholesale destruction of the entire orchestra, haunted his mind.

Another great fire might wipe Chicago out of existence. The one thing which his imagination failed to conceive, was the possibility that he, Lewis Peckham, might be deterred from hearing the concert when once it should take place. In the interim he made repeated calculations of the number of hours that must be lived through before May 16th. Hillerton came across a half sheet of paper covered with such calculations, and was somewhat puzzled by the prominence of the figure 24. An odd price to pay for a mining stock. He was afraid it was the "Adeline Maria," a notorious swindle. Well, Peckham might as well get his lesson at the hands of the faithless Adeline Maria as by any other means. He was bound to come to grief sooner or later, but that was no business of Hillerton's.

On May 7th, Hillerton came down with pleurisy and Peckham suddenly found himself at the head of affairs. Hillerton had no partner; no one but Peckham could take his place. And in Peckham's moral constitution was a substratum of unshakable fidelity upon which the astute Hillerton had built. Cursing his own unimpeachable sense of duty, Peckham could see but one straw of hope to clutch at. It might be a light case.

He went directly to the doctor's office, and with a feverish anxiety apparent in his voice and bearing, he asked how long Hillerton was likely to be laid up.

"Curious," thought the doctor during that carefully calculated pause which your experienced practitioner so well knows the value of. "Curious how fond folks get of James Hillerton. The fellow looks as though his own brother were at death's door."

"I think there is nothing serious to apprehend," he answered soothingly. "Hillerton has a good constitution. I've no doubt he will be about again by the end of the month."

Peckham went white to the lips.

"I suppose that's the best you can promise," he said.

"Yes, but I can promise that safely."

The confidential clerk went back to the office filled with a profound loathing of life.

"If liquor was n't so nasty, I'd take to drink," he said to himself as he sat down at Hillerton's desk and set to work.

The next day was Sunday, and Peckham was at something of a loss what to do with it. He hated the sight of his room. The odor of the straw matting and the pattern of the wall-paper were inextricably associated with those

anticipations which he had been rudely cheated out of. To escape such associations he took an electric car to the Bluffs, those rock-bound islands in the prairie sea which lie a couple of miles to the east of the town. There was only one other passenger besides himself, a man with a gun, who softly whistled a popular air, very much out of tune. Peckham came perilously near kicking the offender, but, happily, the fellow got off just in time, and went strolling across the open with the gun over his shoulder. Once he stooped to pick a flower which he stuck in his buttonhole. Queer, thought Peckham, that a man should go picking flowers and whistling out of tune! There were the mountains, too. Some people made a great deal of them—great, stupid masses of dumb earth! He remembered he had thought them fine himself the other day when there were shadows on them. But to-day! How the sun glared on their ugly reddish sides! And what was it that had gone wrong anyhow? He could not seem to remember, and on the whole he did not wish to.

Now Lewis Peckham was neither losing his mind, nor had he been drowning his sorrows in the conventional dram. The simple fact of the matter was that he had not slept fifteen

minutes consecutively all night long, and his brain was not likely to clear up until he had given it a chance to recuperate. By the time he had left the car and climbed the castellated side of Pine Bluff he was still miserably unhappy, but he had altogether lost track of the cause of his unhappiness. He strayed aimlessly along the grassy top of the Bluff, away from the road, and down a slight incline, into a sheltered hollow. At the foot of a strange, salmon-colored column of rock was a little group of budding scrub-oaks. Peckham crawled in among them, and in about thirty seconds he was fast asleep. There he lay for hours. A blue jay, chattering in a pine-tree near at hand, made no impression upon his sleep-deadened ear ; a pair of ground squirrels scuttled in and out among the scrub-oaks, peering shyly at the motionless intruder, and squeaked faintly to one another, with vivacious action of nose and tail. They were, perhaps, discussing the availability of a certain inviting coat-pocket for purposes of domestic architecture. An occasional rumble of wheels on the road, a dozen rods away, startled the birds and squirrels, but Peckham slept tranquilly on, and dreamed that the Leitmann Orchestra was playing in the Springtown Opera House, and

that he, by reason of his being an early Christian martyr, was forced to roast at the stake just out of hearing of the music.

It was well on in the afternoon when he came to himself, to find his boots scorched almost to a crisp in the sun which had been pouring upon them. He pulled himself out from among the scrub-oaks, and got his feet out of the sun. Then he looked at his watch; and after that he looked at the view.

The view was well worth looking at in the mellow afternoon light. Peckham gazed across the shimmering gold of the plain, to the mountains, which stood hushed into a palpitating blue; the Peak alone, white and ethereal, floating above the foot hills in the sun. Peckham was impressed in spite of himself. It made him think of a weird, mystical strain of music that had sometimes haunted his brain and yet which he had never been able to seize and capture. As he gazed on the soaring, mystical Peak, he remembered his dream, and slowly, but very surely, he perceived that a purpose was forming in his mind, almost without the connivance of his will. He got upon his feet and laughed aloud. A sudden youthful intoxication of delight welled up within him and rang forth in that laugh. Life, for

the first time in three years, seemed to him like a glorious thing; an irresistible, a soul-stirring purpose had taken possession of him, and he knew that no obstacle could stand against it.

He started for the town almost on a run, scorning the prosaic cars which harbored passengers who whistled out of tune. He struck directly across the intercepting plain, and though he soon had to slacken his pace, his wingèd thoughts went on before him, and he took no note of the distance.

That evening Peckham sent off a telegram of one hundred and eleven words to Heinrich Leitmann, of the Leitmann Orchestra, and Monday afternoon the following answer came:

"Full Leitmann Orchestra can engage for Springtown, evening of 19th. Terms, five thousand dollars, expenses included. Answer before 13th. Buffalo, N. Y.

(Signed) "H. LEITMANN."

And now Lewis Peckham came out a full-fledged speculator. He sold out of four mines and bought into six; he changed his ventures three times in twenty-four hours, each time on a slight rise. He haunted the stockbroker's offices, watching out for "pointers"; he

button-holed every third man on the street; he drank in every hint that was dropped in his hearing. On Tuesday afternoon he "cleaned up" his capital and found himself in possession of three thousand five hundred dollars.

"Peckham 's going it hard," men said at the club. "He must be awfully bitten."

All day Wednesday he could not muster courage to put his money into anything, though stocks were booming on every hand. And yet on Wednesday, as on Monday and on Tuesday, he did his office work and superintended that of his subordinates methodically and exactly. The substratum of character which the long-headed Hillerton had built upon, held firm.

On Wednesday evening Peckham stood, wild-eyed and haggard, in the light of Estabrook's drug-store and scanned the faces of the foot-passengers. Early in the evening Elliot Chittenden came along with a grip-sack in his hand, just down from Lame Gulch. Peckham fell upon him like a foot-pad, whispering hoarsely:

"For God's sake give me a pointer."

"Jove!" said Chittenden, afterward, "I thought it was a hold-up, sure as trumps."

At the moment, however, he maintained his composure and only said :

"The smelter returns from the Boa Constrictor are down to-day. Two hundred and seventeen dollars to the ton. I 've got all the stuff I can carry, so I don't mind letting you in. The papers will have it to-morrow, though they 're doing their best to keep it back."

Into the Boa Constrictor Peckham plunged the next morning, for all he was worth. His money brought him ten thousand shares. The morning papers did not have it, and all that day the Boa Constrictor lay as torpid as any other snake in cold weather. Peckham's face had taken on the tense, wild look of the gambler. He left the office half a dozen times during the day to look at the stock-boards. He had a hundred minds about taking his money out and putting it into something else. But nothing else promised anything definite, and he held on.

The evening papers gave the smelter returns, precisely as Chittenden had stated them. Now would the public "catch on" quick enough, or would they take ten days to do what they might as well come to on the spot ?

At nine o'clock the next morning, Peckham

was on the street lying in wait for an early broker. It was not until half-past nine that they began to arrive.

"Any bids for Boa Constrictor?" Peckham inquired of Macdugal, the first-comer.

"They were bidding forty cents at the club last night, with no takers."

"Let me know if you get fifty cents bid."

"How much do you offer?"

"Ten thousand shares."

"Oh! see here, Peckham! I would n't sell out at such a price. The thing 's sure to go to a dollar inside of thirty days."

"I don't care a *hang* where it goes in thirty days. I want the money to-day."

"Whew! Do you know anything better to put it into?"

"I know something *a million times better!*" cried Peckham, in a voice sharp with excitement.

"The fellow 's clean daft," Macdugal remarked to his partner, a few minutes later.

"I should say so!" was the reply. "Queer, too, how suddenly it takes 'em. A week ago I should have said that was the coolest head of the lot. He did n't seem to care a chuck for the whole business. Wonder if he 's gone off his base since Hillerton was laid up. Hope

he isn't in for a swindle. He 'd be just game for a sharper to-day."

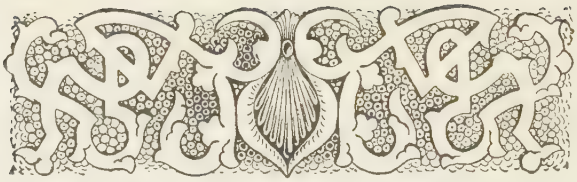
At noon Peckham sold his ten thousand shares of B. C. for five thousand dollars. He could have got six thousand the next morning, but then, as he reflected, what good would it have done him? His first act after depositing the check received for his stock, was to send the following telegram :

"Leitmann Orchestra engaged for Springtown, May 19th. Five thousand dollars deposited in First National Bank. Particulars by letter.
(Signed) "Lewis Peckham."

It is not a usual thing for an impecunious young man to invest five thousand dollars in a single symphony concert, but there was one feature of the affair which was more unusual still; namely, the fact that the consummation of that same young man's hopes was complete. For two beatific hours on the evening of the memorable 19th of May, Lewis Peckham's cup was full. He sat among the people in the balcony, quiet and intent, taking no part in the applause, looking neither to the right nor to the left. But if he gave no outward sign, perhaps it was because his spirit was so far uplifted as to be out of touch with his body.

The money which he had expended in the gratification of what the uninitiated would call a whim, seemed to him the paltriest detail, quite unworthy of consideration. When he thought of it at all it was to recall the story of the gaunt customer who paid so handsomely for his whisky, and to note the confirmation of his theory, that "if you only want anything bad enough no price is too high to pay for it."

And in still another particular Lewis Peckham's experience was unique. He never gambled again. He had a feeling that he had got all he was entitled to from the fickle goddess. When pressed to try his luck once more he would only say, with his old, indifferent shrug: "No, thanks. I 've had my fling and now I 've got through."



X.

A ROCKY MOUNTAIN SHIPWRECK.

"BIXBY'S Art Emporium" was a temple of such modest exterior that visitors were conscious of no special disappointment upon finding that there was, if possible, less of "art" than of "emporium" within. A couple of show-cases filled with agate and tiger-eye articles, questionable looking "gems," and the like; a table in the centre of the shop piled high with Colorado views of every description; here and there on the walls a poor water-color or a worse oil-painting; a desultory Navajo rug on a chair: these humble objects constituted the nearest approach to "art" that the establishment could boast. The distinctive feature of the little shop was the show-case at the rear, filled with books of pressed wildflowers; these, at least, were the chief source of income in the business, and

therefore Marietta spent every odd half-hour in the manufacture of them. A visitor, when he entered, was apt to suppose that the shop was empty ; for the black, curly head bent over the work at the window behind the back counter was not immediately discernible. It was a fascinating head, as the most unimpressionable visitor could not fail to observe when the tall figure rose from behind the counter,—fascinating by reason of the beautiful hair, escaping in soft tendrils from the confining knot ; fascinating still more by reason of the perfect grace of poise. The face was somewhat sallow and very thin ; care and privation had left their marks upon it. The mouth was finely modelled, shrewd and humorous ; but it was the eyes, dark, and darkly fringed as those of a wood-nymph, that dominated the face ; one had a feeling that here was where the soul looked out. To hear Marietta speak, however, was something of a disenchantment ; her tone was so very matter-of-fact, her words so startlingly to the point. If the soul looked out at the eyes, the lips at least had little to say of it.

The visitor, if a stranger, had an excellent opportunity of making his observations on these points, for Marietta usually remained

standing, in a skeptical attitude, behind the distant counter until he had shown signs of "business" intentions. She was very ready to stand up and rest her back, but she had no idea of coming forward to indulge an aimless curiosity as to the origin and price of her art treasures. An old customer, on the other hand, was treated with an easy good-fellowship so marked that only those who liked "that sort of thing" ever became old customers.

"Well, how 's everything?" was the usual form of greeting, as the tall willowy figure passed round behind the counters and came opposite the new-comer.

"Did your folks like the frame?" would come next, if the customer chanced to have had a frame sent home recently. Marietta was agent for a Denver art firm, which framed pictures at a "reasonable figure"; or rather, Jim was the agent, and Jim being Marietta's husband, and too sick a man of late to conduct his business, did not have to be reckoned with.

In spite of the fact that she was generally known as "Mrs. Jim," many people forgot that Marietta had a husband, for he was never visible now-a-days. But Marietta never forgot, never for one single instant, the wasted

figure in the easy chair at the window above the shop, the pale sunken face with the shining eyes, turned always toward the stairway the instant her foot touched the lower step. The look of radiant welcome that greeted her as often as her head appeared above the opening on a level with the uneven deal floor, that look was always worth coming up for.

She did not bring her work and sit upstairs with Jim, because there was but one small window in the dingy, slant-roofed loft, that served as bed-chamber, kitchen, and parlor, and she knew he liked to sit at the window and watch the panorama of the street below. The broad, sunny Springtown thoroughfare, with its low, irregular wooden structures, likely, at any moment, to give place to ambitious business "blocks"; with its general air of incompleteness and transitoriness brought into strong relief against the near background of the Rocky Mountains, was alive with human interest. Yet, singularly enough, it was not the cowboy, mounted on his half-broken bronco that interested Jim; not the ranch wagon, piled high with farm produce, women, and children; not even the Lame Gulch "stage,"—a four-seated wagon, so crowded with rough-looking men that their legs dangled outside like fringe

on a cowboy's "shaps,"—none of these sights made much impression on the sick man at his upper window. The work-a-day side of life was far too familiar to Jim to impress him as being picturesque or dramatic. What he did care for, what roused and satisfied his imagination, was what was known in his vocabulary as "style." It was to the "gilded youth" of Springtown that he looked for his entertainment. He liked the yellow fore-and-aft buck-boards, he enjoyed the shining buggies, especially when their wheels were painted red; dog-carts and victorias ranked high in his esteem. He knew, to be sure, very little about horses; their most salient "points" escaped him: he gave indiscriminate approval to every well-groomed animal attached to a "stylish" vehicle, and the more the merrier! It is safe to declare that he was a distinctly happier man from that day forward on which Mr. Richard Dayton first dazzled the eyes of Springtown with his four-in-hand.

This happened early in February and the day chanced to be a warm one, so that Jim's window was open. He was sitting there, gazing abstractedly at the Peak which rose, a great snowy dome, above Tang Ling's shop across the way. Jim seldom spoke of the mountains,

nor was he aware of paying any special attention to them. "I ain't much on Nature," he had always maintained; and since Marietta admitted the same lack in herself there seemed to be nothing in that to regret. Yet it is nevertheless true that Jim had his thoughts, as he sat, abstractedly gazing at those shining heights, thoughts of high and solemn things which his condition brought near to him, thoughts which he rarely said anything about. To-day, as he watched the deep blue shadows brooding upon the Peak, he was wondering in a child-like way what Heaven would be like. Suddenly the musical clink of silver chains struck his ear, and the look of abstraction vanished. He had never heard those bridle chains before. Somebody had got something new! A moment more, and, with a fine rush and jingle, and a clear blast from the horn, the four-in-hand dashed by.

"Hurrah!" Jim cried huskily, as Marietta's foot trod the stair.

"I say, Jim! You seen 'em?"

She came up panting, for the stairs were very steep and narrow.

"Seen 'em? I rather guess! Was n't it bully? Do you reckon they 'll come back this way?"

"Course they will! Don't you s'pose they like to show themselves off? And the horn! did you hear the horn, Jim? I wonder if that 's the way they sound in Switzerland!"

She came up and stood with her hand on Jim's shoulder, looking down into the street.

"And just to think of it, Jim!" she said, a moment later. "They say he 's made lots of money right here in mines! If we was in mines we might have made some."

"More likely to lose it," Jim answered. He was not of the stuff that speculators are made of.

The shop-bell rang, and Marietta hurried downstairs, to spend ten minutes in selling a ten-cent Easter card; while Jim sat on, forgetting his burden of weakness and pain, and all his far-away dreams, in anticipation of the returning four-in-hand.

In Marietta, too, the jingle of the four-in-hand had struck a new key-note; her thoughts had taken a new turn. If Mr. Dayton had made money in mines why should not she and Jim do the same? They needed it far more than he did. To him it only meant driving four horses instead of one; to them it might mean driving one horse once in a while. It might even mean giving up the tiresome, profitless

shop, and going to live in a snug little house of their own, where there should be a porch for Jim in pleasant weather and, for cold days, a sitting-room with two windows instead of one where she could work at her flower-books, while they planned what they should do when Jim got well. She sat over her pressed flowers, which she handled with much skill, while she revolved these thoughts in her mind. She was busy with her columbines, a large folio of which lay on a table near by. At her left hand was a pile of square cards with scalloped edges, upon which the columbines were to be affixed ; at her right was a small glass window-pane smeared with what she called "stickum." As she deftly lifted the flowers, one by one, without ever breaking a fragile petal, she laid each first upon the "stickum"-covered square of glass and then upon the Bristol-board. She was skilful in always placing the flower precisely where it was to remain upon the page, so that the white surface was kept unstained. Then she further secured each brittle stem with a tiny strip of paper pasted across the end. She lifted a card and surveyed her work critically, thinking the while, not of the wonderful golden and purple flower, holding its beautiful head with as stately a grace as if it were still swaying

upon its stem, but of the great "mining-boom" that was upon the town, and of the chances of a fortune.

Half-an-hour had passed since the shop-bell had last tinkled, and Marietta was beginning to think of making Jim a flying call, when she heard his cane rapturously banging the floor above. This was the signal for her to look out into the street, which she promptly did, and, behold! the four-in-hand had stopped before the door, a groom was standing at the leaders' heads, and the master of this splendid equipage was just coming in, his figure looming large and imposing in the door-way.

"Good morning, Mrs. Jim," he called before he was well inside the shop. "I want one of your ten-dollar flower-books."

Quite unmoved by the lavishness of her customer, Marietta rose in her stately way, and drew forth several specimens of her most expensive flower-book. Dayton examined them with an attempt to be discriminating, remarking that the book was for some California friends of his wife who were inclined to be "snifty" about Colorado flowers.

"That 's the best of the lot," Marietta volunteered, singling out one which her customer had overlooked.

"So it is," he replied; "do it up for me, please."

This Marietta proceeded to do in a very leisurely manner. She was making up her mind to a bold step.

"Say, Mr. Dayton," she queried, as she took the last fold in the wrapping paper; "what's the best mine to go into?"

"The best mine? Oh, I would n't touch one of them if I were you!"

"Yes, you would, if you were me! So you might as well tell me a good one or I might make a mistake."

She held her head with the air of a princess, while the look of a wood-nymph still dwelt in her shadowy eyes, but words and tone meant "business."

"How much money have you got to lose?"

"Oh, fifty or a hundred dollars," she said carelessly.

Dayton strolled to the door and back again before he answered. He was annoyed with Mrs. Jim for placing him in such a position, but he did not see his way out of it. The next man she asked might be a sharper. His ideas of woman's "sphere" were almost mediæval, but somehow they did not seem to fit Mrs. Jim's case.

"Well," he said at last with evident reluctance; "the 'Horn of Plenty' does n't seem to be any worse than the others, and it may be a grain better. But it 's all a gamble, just like roulette or faro, and I should think you had better keep out of it altogether."

The "Horn of Plenty"! It was a name to appeal to the most sluggish imagination; the mere sound of it filled Marietta with a joyful confidence. Within the hour she had hailed a passing broker and negotiated with him for five hundred shares of the stock at twenty cents a share.

It was not without a strange pang, to be sure, that she wrote out her check for the amount; for just as she was signing her name the unwelcome thought crossed her mind that the person who was selling that amount of stock for a hundred dollars must believe that sum of money to be a more desirable possession than the stock! She felt the meaning of the situation very keenly, but she did not betray her misgivings. As she finished the scrawling signature she only lifted her head with a defiant look, and said: "If anybody tells Jim, I 'll *chew 'em up!*"

Inches, the broker, thus admonished, only laughed. Indeed, the thing Inches admired

most in Mrs. Jim was her forcible manner of expressing herself. He admired and liked her well enough, for that and for other reasons, to take a very disinterested pleasure in putting her in the way of turning an honest penny.

The broker's faith in the "Horn of Plenty" was almost as implicit as Marietta's own, and it was with no little pride that he brought the certificate in to her the following day, and unfolded it to her dazzled contemplation. It was a very beauteous production done in green and gold, the design being suggestive and encouraging. It represented a woman clad in green, pointing with a magic golden wand in her left hand toward a group of toiling green miners, while from a golden cornucopia in her right she poured a shower of gold upon an already portentous pyramid of that valuable metal, planted upon a green field.

As Marietta refolded the crisply rustling paper, Inches bent his head toward her and said, confidentially: "She's bound to touch fifty cents inside of thirty days;" and Marietta, still thinking of the bountiful lady of the golden cornucopia, believed him.

"Inside of thirty days" the "H. O. P.," as it was familiarly called, was selling at forty-

five cents, and the world was very much agog on the subject. There had been fluctuations in the meanwhile, fluctuations which Marietta watched with eager intentness. Once, on the strength of disquieting rumors about the management, the stock dropped to sixteen cents and Marietta's hopes sank accordingly ; she felt as if she had picked Jim's pocket. But the "H. O. P.," soon rallied, and day by day it crept upwards while Marietta's spirits crept upwards with it, cautiously, questioningly. Should she sell? Should she hold on? If only she might talk it over with Jim! That was something she poignantly missed ; she had never had a secret from Jim before. To make up for her reticence on this point she used to tell him more minutely than ever of all that went on in the shop below. Jim thought he had never known Marietta so entertaining.

"I say, Marietta, it 's a shame you 're nothing but a shop-keeper's wife!" he said to her one evening as she sat darning stockings by the lamp-light in the dingy attic room. "You 'd ought to have been a duchess or a governor's wife or something like that, so 's folks would have found out how smart you was."

"Listen at him!" cried Marietta.

The words might have offended the taste of the governor who had failed to secure this valuable matrimonial alliance, but the poise of the pretty head, as she cast an affectionate look upon Jim, lying on the old sofa, would have graced the proudest duchess of them all.

Now the "Horn of Plenty" was a Lame Gulch stock, and, since the mining-camp of Lame Gulch had been in existence less than a year, the value of any mine up there was a very doubtful quantity. It was perhaps the proximity of the camp to Springtown, that fired the imagination of the Springtown public, perhaps the daily coming and going of people between the two points. Be that as it may, the head must have been a very level one indeed that could keep its balance through the excitement of that winter's "boom." There were many residents of Springtown who had a sentiment for the Peak, more intelligent and more imaginative than any Marietta could boast, yet it is probable that the best nature-lover of them all shared something of her feeling, now that she had come to regard the Peak as the mountain on the other side of which the Lame Gulch treasures lay awaiting their resurrection.

"Just the other side of the Peak!" What magic in those words, spoken from time to time by one and another of the Springtown people. "Just the other side of the Peak!" Marietta would say to herself, lifting to the noble mountain eyes bright with an interest such as he in his grandest mood had never awakened there before.

Suppose the "Horn of Plenty" should go to a dollar!—to five dollars,—to ten dollars,—to twenty-five dollars! Her mind took the leap with ease and confidence. Had not Bill Sanders said that there were forty millions in it, and had he not seen the mine with his own eyes? Marietta had a mental picture of a huge mountain of solid gold, and when, to complete the splendor of the impression, men talked of "free gold," the term seemed to her to signify a buoyant quality, the quality of pouring itself out in spontaneous plenty. She heard much talk of this kind, for the "H. O. P." was the topic of the hour, and her customers discussed it among themselves. Forty millions almost in plain sight! That was forty dollars a share, and she had five hundred shares! And all this time she was thinking, not of wealth and luxury, but only of a snug cottage in a side street, where there should be two windows

in the sitting-room, where she might sit and chat with Jim while she made her flower-books, planning what they should do when he got well. How little she asked; how reasonable it was, how fair! And if only the "H. O. P." were to go to five dollars a share she would venture it.

Meanwhile people were bidding forty-five cents, and Inches had called twice in one morning to ask if she would not sell at that price.

"What makes them want it so much?" she asked on the occasion of his second visit.

"Oh, just an idea they 've got that it 's going higher," Inches answered indifferently.

"Well, s'posing it is; why should I want to sell?"

"Why, you 'd have made a pretty good thing in it, and you might like to have your bird in hand, don't you know?"

Marietta sat down to her flower-books and worked on composedly, while Inches still lingered.

"That 's a real pretty painting of the Peak over there," he remarked presently, nodding his head toward a crude representation of that much-travestied mountain.

Marietta knew better, but she said nothing.

"What do you ask for that now?" he persisted.

"Oh, I guess about a hundred dollars," she returned facetiously. "The Peak comes high now-a-days, 'cause Lame Gulch is right round on the other side."

There was another pause before the broker spoke again.

"Then, s'posing I could get you forty-six cents for your stock, would you take it? That 's rather above the market price, you know."

"'T aint up to my price," said Marietta, trying to make a group of painter's brush look artistic.

"What would you take for it then?" asked Inches.

Marietta put down her work and drew herself up, to rest her back, and make an end of the interview at a blow.

"Look here, Mr. Inches," she said, with decision ; "seeing you want the stock so bad, I guess I 'll hold on to it !"

She was still holding on with unwavering persistence when, a few days after that, Dayton came into the shop. He wondered, as he entered the door, what could be the unpleasant association that was aroused in him by the

familiar atmosphere of skins and dried flowers and general "stock in trade" which pervaded the place. No sooner did his eye fall upon Marietta coming towards him, however, than he recalled the distasteful part of adviser which had been forced upon him on the occasion of his last visit. He tried to think that he had washed his hands of the whole matter, but, "Mrs. Jim," he found himself saying; "did you go into mines the other day?"

"Yes."

"What did you buy?"

"H. O. P."

"What did you pay?"

"Twenty cents."

"Sold yet?"

"No."

Dayton took the little parcel she was handing him. He had come in for a lead-pencil and had bought, in addition, a stamp-box, a button-hook, and a plated silver photograph frame, not one of which newly acquired treasures he had the slightest use for. They were very neatly tied up, however. He wished Mrs. Jim would stick to her legitimate business which she did uncommonly well.

"I think I would sell out my 'H. O. P.' if I were you," he said.

"Is n't it going any higher?" she asked.

"Very likely ; but it 's a swindle."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I mean that the management 's bad, and they don't know the first thing about what they 've got, any way. Honestly, Mrs. Jim, it is n't safe to hold."

Marietta's heart sank ; if she sold her stock what was to become of the little house with the two windows in the sitting-room? She did not reply, and Dayton went on :

"Of course," he said ; "I can't tell that the thing won't go to a dollar, but there is really no basis for it. I 've sold out every share I held, and I don't regret it, though it has gone up ten points since then."

Marietta regarded him attentively. There was no mistaking his sincerity,—and he probably knew what he was talking about.

"Well," she said at last, with a profound sigh ; "I guess I 'll do as you say. It worked pretty well the other time."

"That 's right, Mrs. Jim, and supposing you let me have your stock. I can probably get you fifty cents for it in the course of the day."

She took the certificate from a drawer close at hand, and having signed it, she gave one

lingering farewell look at the green lady and her golden horn.

"I may as well write a check for the amount now," Dayton said.

"But maybe you can't get it."

"More likely to get a little over. If I do I'll bring it in."

Dayton looked into her face as he spoke, and its beauty struck him as pathetic. There were lines and shadows there which he had not noticed before.

"I wish, Mrs. Jim," he said, "that you would n't do anything more in mines; it 's an awfully risky business at the best. There is n't one of us that knows the first thing about it."

She gave him a sceptical look; was he so entirely sincere, after all?

"Some of you know enough about it to make an awful lot of money in it," she answered quietly.

"That is n't knowledge," he declared; "it 's luck!"

"Comes to the same thing in the end," said Marietta.

If it had not been for those pathetic lines and shadows, Dayton would have turned on his heel then and there, disgusted with what seemed to him unfeminine shrewdness. As it

was, he said : "Well, then, why not let me be your broker? I'm on the street half the time, and I could attend to your business a great deal better than you could."

Marietta did not commit herself to any agreement. She put her check away, still too regretful about the dreams she had relinquished, to rejoice in the mere doubling of her money.

Late in the afternoon she was paying a visit to Jim. In spite of the brilliant sunshine that flooded the little garret, at this hour, the place seemed dingier and drearier than ever. Jim, too, she thought, was not looking quite as well as usual ; his hand as she took it was hot and dry. She knelt down beside him and they looked out at the Peak, rising grand and imposing beyond the low roofs. Marietta was thinking of the gold, "just round on the other side," but Jim's thoughts had wandered farther still ; or was it, after all, nearer to the sick man with the wistful light in his eyes?

"I say, Marietta," he said, "I wonder what Heaven 's like."

She had never heard him speak like that, and the words went to her heart like a knife. But she answered, gently :

"I guess we don't know much about it, Jim ; only that it'll be Heaven."

"I suppose when we get there, you and I, Springtown will seem very far away."

"I don't know, Jim," Marietta said, looking still out toward the Peak, but thinking no longer of the gold on the other side. "I should n't like any of our life together ever to seem very far away."

Just then the sound of the horn rang musically down the street and a moment later the brake went by. The horses' heads were toward home and they knew it; the harness jingled and glittered. On the brake were half-a-dozen well-dressed people laughing and talking gaily; health and prosperity seemed visibly in attendance upon that little company of fortunates. They passed like a vision, and again the sound of the horn came ringing down the street.

Jim turned and looked at Marietta who had been almost as excited as he. A thousand thoughts had chased themselves through her brain as the brake went by. She sighed in the energetic manner peculiar to her, and then she said: "O Jim! If you could only be like that for just one day!"

Perhaps he had had the same thought but her words dispelled it.

"Never mind, Etta," he said. "I would n't change with him;" and Marietta shut away

the little speech in her heart to be happy over at her leisure.

The next day the invalid was not as well as usual and Mrs. Jim spent half her time running up and down stairs. Inches came in in the course of the day and offered her sixty cents for her "Horn of Plenty," and she thought with a pang how fast it was going up. The thought haunted her all day long, but she could not leave Jim to take any steps toward retrieving her opportunity, and after that first visit Inches did not come in again. She took out her big check once or twice in the course of the day and looked at it resentfully; and as she brooded upon the matter, it was borne in upon her with peculiar force that she had made a fatal blunder in exchanging her "chances" for that fixed, inexpansive sum. Had it not been cowardly in her to yield so easily? Supposing Dayton himself had lacked courage at the critical moment; where would his four-in-hand have been to-day? She was sure that no timid speculator had ever made a fortune; on the contrary, she had often heard it said that a flash of courage at the right moment was the very essence of success in speculation. She remembered the expression "essence of success."

By the time evening came the fever of speculation was high in her veins, and urged on by her own brooding fancies, uncontradicted from without, unexposed to the light of day, she did an incredible thing.

As she drew forth her writing materials in order to put her new and startling resolution into execution, she paused and looked about the familiar little shop with a feeling of estrangement. There was an incongruity between the boldness of the thing she was about to do, and the hard and fast limitations of her lot, which the sight of those humble properties brought sharply home to her. The first pen she took up was stiff and scratchy ; the sound of it was like a challenge to the outer world to come and pass judgment upon her. She flung the pen to one side in nervous trepidation, and then she searched until she found one that was soft and pliable, and went whispering over the paper like a fellow-conspirator.

This was what she wrote :

"Dear Mr. Dayton,

"I want to go into the 'Horn of Plenty' again, and I can't get away to attend to it. I enclose your check, and one of my own for $400. Please buy me what the money will bring. They say it is n't a swindle, and any way I want some. You said to come to you, and

that was the same as saying you'd do it, if I asked you to. I don't care what you pay; get what you can for the money.

"Yours truly,

"M. Bixby."

Another morning found Jim so ill that they sent for the doctor. On the same day Inches came in and offered seventy-five cents for the stock. Marietta had not told him that it was sold and she did not propose to do so. In the afternoon the price had "jumped" to ninety cents, but by that time she was too anxious about Jim to care.

For five weeks the "Art Emporium" was closed, and in that time the face of the world had changed for Marietta. She realized the change when she came down-stairs and opened the shop again. It was impossible to feel that life was restored to its old basis. There was a change too in her, which was patent to the most casual observer. It was, indeed, a very wan and thin Marietta that at last came forward to meet her customers; her eyes looked alarmingly big, and though nothing could disturb the pose of the beautiful head, there was a droop in the figure, that betokened bodily and mental exhaustion.

A good many customers came in to make

Easter purchases,—for the following Sunday was Easter,—and many others to inquire for Jim. As the old, familiar life began to reassert itself, as she began to feel at home again in the old, accustomed surroundings, her mind recurred, in a half-dazed way, to her speculation. She did not herself know much about it, for Dayton had never sent her her certificate. Probably he had come with it when the shop was closed. She supposed she must be too tired to have much courage; that must be why her heart sank at the thought of what she had done. She was sitting by the work-table, her head in her hands, pondering dully. At the sound of the shop-bell she looked up, mechanically, and saw Inches coming in.

"Good morning, Mrs. Jim," he said. "How 's your husband?"

"Jim 's better, thank you," she replied, and the sound of her own confident words dispelled the clouds.

Inches looked at her narrowly, and then he began pulling the ears of a mounted fox-skin that was lying on the counter, as he remarked casually: "Hope you got rid of your 'H. O. P.' in time."

"In time?" she asked. "In time? What do you mean?"

"Why, before they closed down. You sold out, I hope?"

There was a sudden catch in her breath.

"Yes, I sold out some time ago."

"Glad of that," he declared, with very evident relief, suddenly losing interest in the fox's ears. Inches had none of Dayton's prejudices in regard to woman's "sphere," but he was none the less rejoiced to know that this particular woman, with the tired-looking eyes, had not "got hurt," as he would have put it.

"It's been a bad business all round," he went on, waxing confidential as he was prone to do. "Why, I knew a man that bought twenty thousand shares at a dollar-ten three weeks ago, just before she closed down, and he's never had the sand to sell."

"What could he get to-day?" Marietta asked. Her voice sounded in her ears strange and far away.

"Well, I don't know. I was offered some at six cents, but I don't know anybody that wants it."

Marietta's throat felt parched and dry, and now there was a singing in her ears; but she gave no outward sign.

"Pretty hard on some folks," she remarked.

"I should say so!"

There was a din in her ears all that afternoon, which was perhaps a fortunate circumstance, for it shut out all possibility of thought. It was not until night came that the din stopped, and her brain became clear again,—cruelly, pitilessly clear.

Deep into the night she lay awake tormenting herself with figures. How hideous, how intolerable they were! They passed and repassed in her brain in the uncompromising search light of conscience, like malicious, mouthing imps. They were her debts and losses, they stood for disgrace and penury, they menaced the very foundation of her life and happiness.

Doubtless the man who had put many thousands into the "Horn of Plenty," and had lacked the "sand" to sell, would have wondered greatly that a fellow-creature should be suffering agony on account of a few hundred dollars. Yet he, in his keenest pang of disappointment, knew nothing whatever of the awful word "ruin"; while Marietta, staring up into the darkness, was getting that lesson by heart.

The town-clock striking three seemed to pierce her consciousness and relieve the strain. She wished the sofa she was lying upon were not so hard and narrow; perhaps if she were

more comfortable she might be able to sleep, and then, in the morning, she might see light. Of course there was light, somewhere, if she could only find it; but who ever found the light, lying on a hard sofa, in pitchy darkness? Perhaps if she were to get up and move about things would seem less intolerable. And with the mere thought of action the tired frame relaxed, the straining eyes were sealed with sleep, the curtain of unconsciousness had fallen upon the troubled stage of her mind.

And when, at dawn, Jim opened frightened eyes, and struggled with a terrible oppression to speak her name, Marietta was still sleeping profoundly.

"Etta!" he gasped. "O, Etta!"

And Marietta heard the whispered name, and thrusting out her hands, as if to tear away a physical bond, broke through the torpor that possessed her, and stood upon her feet. She staggered, white and trembling, to Jim's bedside, and there, in the faint light, she saw that he was dying.

"Etta, Etta," he whispered, "I want you!"

She sank upon her knees beside him, but the hand she folded in her own was already lifeless.

Slowly the light increased in that dingy garret, until the sun shone full upon the face of the Peak, fronting the single window of the chamber in uncompassionate splendor. Occasional sounds of traffic came up from the street below; the day had begun. And still Marietta knelt beside the bed, clasping the hand she loved, with a passionate purpose to prolong the mere moment of possession that was all that was left her now, all it was worth being alive for. He wanted her, he wanted her,—and oh, the years and years that he must wait for her, in that strange, lonely, far-away heaven!

"Jim, Jim," she muttered from time to time, with a dry gasp in her throat, that almost choked her; "Jim, O Jim!"

By-and-by, when the sun was high in the heavens, and all the world was abroad, she got upon her feet, and went about the strange new business that death puts upon the broken-hearted.

The day after the funeral was the third of April, and Marietta knew that all her April bills were lying in the letterbox, the silent menace which had seemed so terrible to her the other day. Well,—that at least was nothing to her now. So much her heart-break had

done for her, that all the lesson of ruin she had conned through those horrible black hours, when Jim was dying and she did not know it, —that lesson at least had lost its meaning. Ruin could not hurt Jim now, and she?—she might even find distraction in it,—find relief.

She went down into the dimly lighted shop, where the shades were closely drawn in the door and in the broad show-window. In that strange midday twilight, she gathered up her mail, and then she seated herself in her old place behind the counter, and began the examination of it.

There were all the bills, just as she had anticipated ; bills for food and bills for medicine ; bills for all those useless odds and ends which made up her stock in trade, which she and Jim had been so proud of a few years ago when they first came to Springtown. She wrote out the various sums in a long column, just to look at them all together, and to feel how little harm they could do her ; and in the midst of the dull, lifeless work, she came upon a letter which did not look like a bill. As she drew it from the envelope, two slips of paper fell out of it, two slips of paper which she picked up and read, with but a dazed, bewildered attention. They were the checks she had sent to

Dayton a month ago; his own check for $250; hers for $400.

Marietta, in her humble joys and sorrows, had never known the irony of Fate, and hence she could not understand about those checks. The meaning of the letter was blurred as she read it. It was from Dayton. He could not know that Jim was dead, for he said nothing of it. But if there was any one who did not know that Jim was dead, could it be true? Her heart gave a wild leap, and she half rose to her feet. What if she were to run up those stairs, quickly, breathlessly? Oh, what then?

But the stillness of the closed shop, the strange half-light that came through the drawn shades, her own black dress, recalled her from that swift and cruel hope, and again she set herself to read the letter.

The words all seemed straight enough, if she could only make sense of them. He had but just read her letter, being returned that morning from the East. The letter had come the day he left town, and thinking that it was a receipted bill, he had locked it up, unopened, in his desk. He feared that Mrs. Jim had been anxious about the matter, and he hastened to relieve her mind. While he apologized for his

own carelessness, he congratulated her upon her escape.

"He congratulates me, he congratulates me!" she whispered hoarsely; "O my God!"

She did not yet comprehend the letter nor the checks which had fluttered to the floor. It was only the last sentence that she took note of, because of its jarring sense.

Suddenly the meaning of it all broke upon her. Those were her checks! Ruin had evaded her! She could not prove upon it her loyalty to Jim, her loyalty to grief. Fate had shipwrecked her, and now it was decreed that the sun should shine and the sea subside in smiling peace. It was more than she could bear. She flung the letter from her, and, stooping, she picked up the checks and crushed them in her clenched hands. How dared they come back to mock at her! How dared Fate take her all, and toss her what she did not value! How dared—Heaven? Was it Heaven she was defying? Ah! she must not lose her soul, Heaven knew she would not lose her soul—for Jim's sake!

She opened her clenched hands and smoothed out the checks, patiently, meekly; and then she went on with the bills, a strange calm in

her mind, different from the calm of the last three days.

And then, for the first time, it struck her that the bills were all made out to Jim.

JAMES BIXBY,
to HIRAM ROGERS, Dr.
to JAMES WILKINS, Dr.
to FIELDS & LYMAN, Dr.

It was his name that would have been disgraced, not hers; his memory would have been stained. She turned white with terror of the danger past.

After a while she put the bills aside, and drew out her folios of pressed flowers. It seemed a hundred years since she had worked upon them. How exquisite they were, those delicate ghosts of flowers;—the regal columbine, the graceful gilia, coreopsis gleaming golden, anemones, pale and soft. How they kept their loveliness when life was past! They were only flower memories, but how fair they were, and how lasting! No frost to blight them, no winds to tear their silken petals any more! Well might they outlast the hand that pressed them!

And soon Marietta found herself doing the old, accustomed work with all the old skill, and

with a new grace and delicacy of touch. And when the friends in her old home which she had left for Jim's sake, urged her to come back to them, she answered, no ;—she would rather stay in Colorado and do her flower-books ;—adding, in a hand that scrawled more than usual with the effort for composure :

"They are my consolation."

XI.

A STROKE IN THE GAME.

THE mining boom was off, and Springtown was feeling the reaction as severely as so sanguine and sunny a little place was capable of doing. To one who had witnessed, a year or more previous, the rising of the tide of speculation, whose tossing crest had flung its glittering drops upon the loftiest and firmest rocks of the business community, the streets of the little Rocky Mountain town had something the aspect of the shore at low tide. Such a witness was Harry Wakefield, if, indeed, a man may be said to have "witnessed" a commotion which has swept him off his feet and whirled him about like a piece of driftwood. It was, to be sure, quite in the character of a piece of driftwood that Wakefield had let himself be drawn into the whirlpool, and he could not escape the feeling that, tossed as he was,

high and dry upon the shore, he was getting quite as good as he deserved.

"Yes, I 'm busted!" he remarked to his friend Chittenden, the stock-broker, as the two men paused before the office-door of the latter. "It was the Race-Horse that finished me up. No, thanks, I won't come in. A burnt child dreads the fire!"

"We 're all cool enough now-a-days," Chittenden replied, shrugging his shoulders. "Could n't get up a blaze to heat a flat-iron!" and he passed in to the office, with the air of a man whose occupation is gone.

As Wakefield turned down the street, his eye fell upon a stock-board across the way, a board upon which had once been jotted down from day to day, a record of his varying fortunes. He remembered how, a few months ago, that same board showed white with Lame Gulch quotations. He reflected that, while the price set against each stock had made but a modest showing, running from ten cents up into the second dollar, a man of sense,—supposing such a phenomenon to have weathered the "boom,"—would have been impressed with the fact that the valuation thus placed upon the infant camp aggregated something like twenty millions of dollars. The absurdity of

the whole thing struck Wakefield with added force, as he read the solitary announcement which now graced the board,—namely :

"To exchange : 1000 Race-Horse for a bull-terrier pup."

"Kind o' funny ; ain't it?" said a voice close beside him.

It was Dicky Simmons, a youth of seedy aspect, but a cheerful countenance, who had come up with him, and was engaged in the perusal of the same announcement.

"Hullo, Simmons ! Where do you hail from ?"

"From Barnaby's ranch. I 'm trying my hand at agriculture until this thing 's blown over !"

"Think it 's going to ?"

"Oh, yes ! When the tide 's dead low it 's sure to turn !" and the old hopeful look glistened in the boy's face.

"That 's the case in Nature," Wakefield objected. "Nature had n't anything to do with the boom. It was contrary to all the laws."

"Oh, I guess Nature has a hand in most things," Dicky replied with cheerful assurance. "Anyhow she 's made a big deal up at Lame

Gulch, and those of us who 've got the sand to hold on will find that she 's in the management."

"Think so?"

"Sure of it!"

"Hope you 're right. Anyhow, though, I 'd try the old girl on agriculture for a while, if I were you. How 's Barnaby doing, by the way?"

"Holding on by the skin of his teeth."

"What 's wrong there?"

"Can't collect;" was the laconic reply.

The two companions in adversity were walking toward the post-office, moved, perhaps, by the subtle attraction which that institution exercises over the man who is "down on his luck." There was no mail due, yet they turned, with one accord, in at the door, and repaired to their respective boxes. As Wakefield looked up from the inspection of his empty one, he saw Simmons, with an open letter or circular in his hand. Catching Wakefield's eye he laughed.

"Well?" Wakefield queried.

"You know, Wake," said Dicky, in a confidential tone. "The thing 's too funny to be serious. Here 's the Trailing Arbutus (you're not in that, I believe), capitalization a million

and a half shares, calls a meeting of stockholders to consider how to raise money to get the mine out of the hands of a receiver. Now, guess how much money they want!"

"How much?"

"*Five hundred dollars!* Five hundred dollars on a million and a half shares! I say, Wake, they could n't be funnier if they tried!"

Agreeable as Dicky's company usually was, Wakefield was glad when the boy hailed the Barnaby milk-cart, and betook himself and his insistent brightness under its canvas shelter. The white covered wagon went rattling out of town, and Wakefield, somewhat to his surprise, found himself striding after it.

"Anyhow, he's hit it off better than I have," he said to himself; and as he perceived how rapidly the cart was disappearing, he had a sense of being distanced, and he involuntarily quickened his pace.

The street he was following was one that he strongly approved of, because it had the originality to cut diagonally across the rectangular plan of the town. The houses on either hand were small and unpretentious, but tidy little homesteads, and he did not like to think of the mortgages with which, according to Chit-

tenden, the "boom" had weighted more than one modest roof. In the strong sense of general disaster which he was struggling under, those mortgages seemed almost visible to the eye. He was glad when he had left the town behind him, and was marching on between stretches of uncultivated prairie and bare reddish hillocks. They, at least, stood for what they were,—and see, how the wildflowers had thrust themselves up through the harsh gritty sand; that great tract of yellow vetches, for instance, that had brought up out of the earth a glory of gold that might well put all Lame Gulch to the blush! Over yonder stood the Range, not beautiful, in the uncompromising noon light, but strong and steadfast, with an almost moral vigor in its outlines.

He had lost sight of the milk-cart altogether, and was plodding on, simply because there seemed to be nothing better to do with himself. He presently came opposite a low, conical hill which he recognized as "Mt. Washington,"—a hill whose elevation above sea-level was said to be precisely that of New England's loftiest peak. Wakefield reflected that he was never likely to reach that classic altitude with less exertion than to-day, and that on the whole it would be rather pleasant

than otherwise to find himself at that particular height. There was a barbed-wire fence intervening, and it pleased him to take it "on the fly." He had undoubtedly been going down-hill of late, but his legs, at least, had held their own, he assured himself, with some satisfaction, as he alighted, right side up, within the enclosure. He thought, with a whimsical turn, of Pheidippides, the youth who used his legs to such good purpose; who "ran like fire,"—shouted, "Rejoice, we conquer!"—then "died in the shout for his meed." How simple life once was, according to Browning and the rest! What a muddle it was to-day, according to Harry Wakefield! And all because a girl had refused him! He had been trying all along not to think of Dorothy Ray, but by the time he had reached the summit of the hill,—that little round of red sand, where only a single yellow cactus had had the courage to precede him,—he knew that his hour of reckoning had come. He had gambled, yes; but it was for her sake he had gambled; he had lost, yes, but it was she he had lost.

He flung himself down on the bare red hill-top, and with his chin in his hands, gazed across irrigated meadows and parched foot-

hills to the grim slope of the mountains. And stretched there, with his elbows digging into the sandy soil, his mind bracing itself against the everlasting hills, he let the past draw near.

There was an atmosphere about that past, a play of light and shadow, a mist of poetry and romance, that made the Colorado landscape in the searching noon light seem typical of the life he had led there :—a crude, prosaic, *metallic* sort of life. And after the first shrinking from the past, his mind began to feel deliciously at home in it.

How he had loved Dorothy Ray ! How the thought of her had pervaded his life, as the sunshine pervades a landscape ! Yet not like the sunshine ; for sunshine is fructifying, and his life had been singularly fruitless. There was no shirking the truth, that the year he had spent reading law in her father's office, the year he had discovered that his old friend and playmate was the girl of his choice, had been a wasted year. In all that did not directly concern her he had dawdled, and Dorothy knew and resented it.

He remembered how, on one occasion, she had openly preferred Aleck Dorr to himself ; Aleck Dorr, with his ugly face and boorish

manners, who was cutting a dash with a newly acquired fortune.

"Dorothy," Wakefield asked abruptly, the next time he got speech of her,—it was at the Assembly and she had only vouchsafed him two dances,—"Dorothy, what do you like about that boor?"

"In the first place he is n't a boor," she answered. "He 's as gentlemanlike as possible."

"Supposing he is, then! That's a recommendation most of us possess."

She gave him a scrutinizing, almost wistful look. How dear she was, standing there in the brilliant gas-light, fresh and natural in her ball-dress and sparkling jewels as she had been when her hair hung down in a big braid over her gingham frock.

"You gentlemanlike? That 's something you could never be, Harry,—because you are a gentleman. But that 's all you are," she added, with a sudden impatience that checked his rising elation.

"I don't see that there was any call for snubbing," he retorted angrily. He was often angry with Dorothy; that was part of the old good-fellowship he had used to value so much, but which seemed so insufficient now.

"Snubbing? I thought I made you a very pretty compliment," she answered, with a little caressing tone that he found illogically comforting.

"You have n't told me why you like this gentlemanlike boor," he persisted.

"I should think anybody might see that! I like him because he amounts to something; because he has made a fortune, if you insist. It takes a *man* to do that!"

Upon which, before Wakefield had succeeded in framing a suitable retort, Dorr came up, with a ponderous joke, and claimed a promised waltz.

Well! Dorr need not be in such thundering spirits! He had no chance with her at any rate!

And only a few months later it turned out that he, Harry Wakefield, had as little chance as Dorr.

At this point in his reflections Wakefield's elbows began to feel rough and gritty. He turned himself round and sat with his back to the mountains, looking eastward, his hands clasping one knee. He was glad the prairie was broken up into mounds and hillocks over there, and had not the look of the sea that it took on from some points of view. There was

a group of pines off to the left ; he had been too preoccupied to observe them as he came along the road,—strangely enough too, for a group of trees is an unusual sight out on the prairie. What a lot of trees there were in the East though, and how wofully he had come to grief among them up there on the North Shore ! Only a year ago it had happened, only a year ago, in the fragrant New England June ! His married sister had had Dorothy and himself visiting her at the same time. Well, Fanny had done her best for him, though it was no good. He wondered, in passing, how it happened that a fellow could come to care more for anybody else than for a sister like Fanny !

He had found Dorothy sitting in perfect idleness under a big pine-tree that lovely June morning. There were robins hopping about the lawn ; the voices of his sister's children came, shrill and sweet, calling to one another as they dug in the garden by the house. The tide was coming in ; he could hear it break against the rocks over yonder, while the far stretches of sea glimmered softly in the sunshine. Dorothy looked so sweet and beneficent as she sat under the big pine-tree in the summer sunshine, that all his misgivings vanished.

Before he knew what he was about he had "asked her."

And here the little drama was blurred and muffled in his memory. He wondered, as he clasped his knees and studied the tops of the pine-trees, how he had put the question; whether he had perhaps put it wrong. He could not recall a word he had said; but her words in reply fell as distinct on his ear, as the note of the meadow-lark, down there by the roadside. How the note of the meadow-lark shot a thrill through the thin Colorado air,—informed with a soul the dazzling day! How cruelly sweet Dorothy's voice had been, as she said:

"No, Harry, I could n't!"

It had made him so angry that he hardly knew how deep his hurt was.

"You have no right to say no!" he had heard himself say.

He could not remember whether that was immediately, or after an interval of discussion. She had stood up and turned away, not deigning to reply. And then the memory of that talk at the ball had struck him like a blow.

"Wait, Dorothy! You must wait!" he had cried, aware that his imperative words clutched her like a detaining hand. Then,

while his breath came fast, almost chokingly, he had said : "Tell me, Dorothy, is it because you don't call me *a man* that you won't have me ?"

The angry challenge in his voice hardened her.

"I don't know anything about how much of a man you are, Harry Wakefield," she had declared, with freezing indifference. "I only know you are not the man for me."

That had been practically the end of it. They had got through the day very creditably he believed, and the next morning they had departed on their several ways.

Wakefield had read law like mad for a week, and then he had started for Colorado. He had a favorite cousin out there whose husband was making a fortune in Lame Gulch stocks, and he thought that even prosaic fortune-hunting in a new world would be better than the gnawing chagrin that monopolized things in the old. Better be active than passive, on any terms. By the time he was well on his westward way, the sting of that refusal had yielded somewhat, and he began to take courage again. Perhaps when he had made a fortune ! "It takes a man to do that," she had said. Well, he had four times the money to start with

that Dick Dayton had had, and look, what chances there were!

Once fairly launched in the stirring, out-of-door Colorado life, his spirits had so far recovered their tone that he could afford to be magnanimous. Accordingly he wrote the following letter to Dorothy:

"Dear Dorothy,

"You were right; I was n't half good enough for you. No fellow is, as far as that goes! Don't you let them fool you on that score! It makes me mad when I think about it. You always knew the worst of me, but you don't really know the first thing about any other man. I 'm coming back next year to try again. Do give me the chance, Dorothy! Remember, I don't tell you you could make anything you like of me—that 's the rubbish the rest will talk. I 'm going to make something of myself first! And if I don't do it in a year, I am ready to work seven years,—or seventy,—or seventy-seven years; if you 'll only have me in the end! That would have to be in Heaven, though, would n't it? Well, it would come to the same thing in the end! It would be Heaven for me, wherever it was!"

Wakefield had the habit of saying to Dorothy whatever came into his head; and so he had written his letter without any thought of effect. But the answer he got was so carefully worded that he could make nothing of it. At

the end of three non-committal pages she wrote :

"I ought not to wish you good luck, for Papa says if you have it it will be your ruin. I did not suppose that circumstances could ruin anybody,—anybody that had any backbone, I mean. But I do wish you good luck all the same, and if you 're the kind of person to be ruined by it, why, I 'm sorry for you ! "

There was something in that letter, non-committal as it was, that gave Wakefield the impression that a correspondence would be no furtherance to his interests. He did not write again, and he only knew, from his sister Fanny, that Dorothy was a greater favorite than ever that season ; a fact from which he could gather little encouragement. He had flung himself like a piece of driftwood into the whirl of speculation ; he had lost more thousands than he cared to think about, the bulk of his patrimony in fact, and his last chance was gone of making the fortune that was to have been the winning of Dorothy. "It takes a man to do that ! " she had said.

Well, that was the end of it ! As far as he was concerned, Dorothy Ray had ceased to exist ; the past had ceased to exist, the pleasant past, with its deceitful mists and bewildering sunbeams. Things out here were

crude, but they were real! He got on his feet and turned about once more. Between Mt. Washington and the range was a fertile ranch; broad fields of vivid alfalfa, big barns, pastures dotted with cattle; a line of light-green cottonwoods ran along the borders of the creek. What was that about the wilderness blossoming like the rose? He turned again and looked toward the barren hillocks. Even they, dead and inhospitable as they appeared at a little distance, afforded nourishment for cactus and painter's-brush, prickly poppy and hardy vetches. Dorothy Ray might do as she pleased,—his fortune might go where it would! That need not be the end of all things. Life, to be sure, might seem a little like a game of chess after the loss of the Queen! Pretty tough work it was likely to be to save the game, but none the less worth while for all that. He wondered what his next move would be,—and meanwhile, before recommencing the game, why not seize the most obvious outlet for his newly roused energies, by tearing down the hill at a break-neck gallop and clearing the wire fence at a bound!

"Took you for a jack-rabbit!" said a gruff voice close at hand, as he landed on his two feet by the dusty roadside.

"Not a bad thing to be," Wakefield panted, falling in step with the speaker, who was walking toward the town at a brisk pace.

"Not unless the dogs are round," the stranger demurred.

"Dogs! A jack-rabbit would never know how game he was, if it was n't for the dogs!"

"Any on your track?" asked the man with a grin. "Looked like it when you come walluping down the mounting!"

"A whole pack of them," Wakefield answered. "Did n't you see anything of them?"

"Can't say I did."

"You 're not so smart as you look, then;" and they went jogging on like comrades of a year's standing.

The new acquaintance appeared to be a man of sixty or thereabouts. A crowbar and shovel which he carried over his shoulder seemed a part of his rough laborer's costume. He had a shrewd, good sort of face, and a Yankee twang to his speech.

"You carry those things as easy as a walking-stick," Wakefield observed, ready to reciprocate in point of compliments. "What do you use them for?"

"Ben mendin' the bit o' *codderoy* down yonder," was the answer.

"Is that your trade?"

"No, not partic'larly. I make a trade of most anything I kin work at. Happened to be out of a job last week, so I took up with this."

"Got through with it?"

"Yes; stopped off to-day. Got done just in time. They start in on the road next week, 'n they 've took me on."

"What road 's that?"

"The new branch in."

"Oh! In to Lame Gulch. I heard they were going to start in on that."

"Yes; the 'Rocky Mounting' are doin' it. They say there 'll be trains runnin' in from the Divide inside of six months."

Wakefield looked sceptical; he had heard that sort of talk before.

"Do you like railroad work?" he asked.

"Not so well 's this. I like my own job better, only 'taint so *stayin'*. Might 've had another month's work, on the road to the cañon over there; but that would ha' ben the end on 't. So I 'm goin' to throw up that job this afternoon."

"What 's wanted on the cañon road?"

"Wal, it wants widenin', an' it wants bracin' up here 'n there, 'n there 's a power of big stuns to be weeded out. A reel purty

job it 's goin' to be, too, in there by the runnin' water, among the *fars* 'n the birds 'n the squirrels."

"I suppose you could hardly have managed that all by yourself?"

"Oh, yes! It 's an easy job."

"And you think you could have done it with just your two hands and a shovel and a crowbar?"

"Wal, yes,—'n a pinch o' powder now and then, 'n somethin' to drill a hole with,—an' a little nat'ral gumption."

Wakefield liked the sound of it all uncommonly well. For a man who had come to a rough place in his own road,—a jumping-off place he had once thought it might prove to be,—would it not be rather a pleasant thing, to smooth off a road for the general public? It would be a stroke in the game, at least, and that was his main concern just now. Such a good, downright, genuine sort of work too! He had an idea that if he could once get his grip on a crowbar, and feel a big rock come off its bottom at his instigation, he should have a stirring of self-respect. After all, of all that he had lost, that was perhaps the most important thing to get back.

Just as he had arrived at this sensible conclusion his companion came to a halt.

"Here 's my shanty; where 's yours?" he asked.

"Have n't got any!"

"I 'd ask you in if we was n't packin' up to go."

"Does your wife go with you?"

"Why, nat'rally!"

"Say," Wakefield queried, as the man turned in at the gate. "How did you go to work to get that job up in the cañon?"

"Went to 'Bijah Lang, the street-commissioner."

"You have n't got any friend who would like you to pass the job over to him?"

"No."

"Think I could do it?"

"Wal, yes,—if you 've got the gumption! Your arms and legs 'pear to be all right! Ever see any work of the kind?"

"Yes; I used to watch them on the road up Bear Mountain, at Lame Gulch."

"Know how to drill a hole in a rock?"

"Learned that when I was a boy."

"Know the difference between *joint* powder and the black stuff?"

"Yes; though I never handled giant powder myself."

"Wal, don't be too free with it, that 's all.

And, say!" he called, as Wakefield in his turn made as if to go. "Look's like as though you'd got somethin' up to Lame Gulch. Wal, you hold on to it, that's all!"

"You believe in Lame Gulch, then?"

"Lame Gulch is all right. It's chockfull of stuff, now I tell ye! Only folks thought they was goin' to fish it out with a rod 'n line."

"Then you really think there's something in it?"

"Somethin' in it? I tell ye, it's chockfull o' stuff! Only folks have got it into their heads that the one thing in this world they kin git without workin' for it, is *gold!* If that was so, what would it be wuth? Less than pig-iron! I tell ye, there ain't nothin' in this world that's to be got without workin' for it, 'n the more work it takes, the more it's wuth! 'N the reason gold 's wuth more 'n most things, is because it takes more work 'n most things; more diggin' 'n more calc'latin'. Why!" he went on, waxing more and more emphatic. "Ef diggin' gold wa' n't no harder 'n mendin' roads, 't would n't *pay* any better,—now I tell ye!"

"Perhaps you're right," Wakefield admitted, "but that's not what we're brought up to think."

"That 's what my boys was brought up to think, 'n they 're actin' accordin'."

"Have you got some boys up at Lame Gulch?"

"Yes, four on 'em. 'N I 've got a claim up there too, 'n they 're workin' it."

"Why don't you go up and work your claim yourself?" asked Wakefield.

A humorous twinkle came into the man's eyes.

"Wal, now I tell ye!" and his voice dropped to a confidential level. "Railroadin' *pays better*, so far!"

"Do your boys get a living out of the mine?"

"Not yet, not yet. But they 're skilled miners. 'N when they git hard up, a couple on 'em put in a month's work for some skalliwag 'company' or other, 'n so they keep agoin'. The three married ones ain't up there at all."

"So you 've got seven sons?"

"Yes; seven boys, all told. We lost a girl," he added, with an indefinable change in his voice. "Her name was Loretty."

With that, Loretty's father passed up the path and disappeared within the house.

"Nice old chap," Wakefield thought, as he

walked on, past the little houses with the presumable mortgages on them. "Nice of him to go on caring for Loretty after he had lost her."

He wondered whether, after all, he had better make such a point of forgetting about Dorothy! Up there on the red hilltop, hobnobbing with the yellow cactus, he had resolved never to think of her again; but down here among human habitations, fresh from the good human intercourse of the last ten minutes, he did not feel so sure about it. He thought that, on the whole, it might be as well to decide that question later. Meanwhile, here was the street-commissioner's door, and here was a decision that must be come to on the spot.

Harry Wakefield always looked back upon the day when he first pried a big rock off its base, as a turning-point in his career; a move that put the game in his own hands. The sensation was different from what he had anticipated. He had fancied that he was about to engage in a single-handed struggle, but no sooner had his grip closed upon the crowbar, no sooner had he felt the mass of rock yield to its pressure, than he found that he was not working single-handed. On the contrary, he had the feeling of having got right down among the forces of nature and of finding them ranged on

his side. It was gravitation that gave the rock its weight, but, look there! how some other law, which he did not know the name of, dwelt in the resisting strength of the iron, worked in the action of his muscles. His legs trembled, as he braced himself to the effort; the veins of his neck throbbed hard; but the muscles of his arms and chest held firm as the crowbar they guided, and slowly, reluctantly, sullenly, the rock went over on its side. He dropped the crowbar from his stiffening grasp and drew himself up, flinging his shoulders back and panting deep and strong.

It was between six and seven o'clock in the morning, a radiant June morning, which seemed alive with pleasant things. As he stood with his head thrown back, taking a good draught of the delicious mountain air, a blue-bird shot, like a bit of the sky, in and out among the solemn pines and delicate aspens. He looked down on the tangle of blossoming vines and bushes that latticed the borders of the brook, which came dashing down from the cañon, still rioting on its way. The water would soon have another cause for clamor, in the big stone that had so long cumbered the road. He should presently have the fun of rolling it over the bank and seeing it settle with

a splash in the bed of the stream where it belonged by rights. After that there was a fallen tree to be tackled, a couple of rods farther on, and then he should take a rest with his shovel and fill in some holes near by.

He had found a deserted lean-to, half way up the cañon, where he had arranged to camp while the work went on. As he thought of Chittenden and Allery Jones and the rest, cooped up there in the town, still anxiously watching the fluctuations of the stock-market, he was filled with compassion for them, and he determined to have them out now and then and give them a camp stew.

Of course the exultation of that first hour's work did not last. Before the day was out, Wakefield had found out what he was "in for." An aching back and blistered hands were providing him with sensations of a less exhilarating order than those of the early morning. At one time, soon after his "nooning" as he liked to call it, the sun blazed so fiercely that he had ignominiously fled before it and taken refuge for an hour or more among the trees. That was the episode which he least liked to remember. He did not quite see why mending a road in the sun should be so much more dangerous than playing polo at high

noon, but, somehow, it hurt more; and he recollected that his late father, who was a physician, had once told him that pain was Nature's warning. Having, then, entered into a close alliance with Nature, he thought it well to take her hints.

Before many days his apprenticeship was over and he was working like a born day-laborer. After the first week he was well rid of aches and pains; the muscles of his back were strengthened, the palms of his hands were hardened, his skull, he thought to himself, must have thickened. In all things, too, he was tuned to a lower key. But if the exhilaration of that first morning was gone, it had only given place to something better; namely, a solid sense of satisfaction. He knew it was all an episode, this form of work at least; he knew that when his "job" was done he should go back into the world and take up the life he had once made a failure of; but he knew also that he should not fail again. A sense of power had come into him; he had made friends with work for its own sake. He believed that his brain was as good as his muscles, that it would respond as readily to the demands he should put upon it. And he had learned to be strenuous with himself.

Wakefield was in correspondence with a friend in San Francisco who wanted him to come out there and practise law. He decided, rather suddenly, to do so, coming to his decision the day after he was told that Dorothy Ray was engaged to be married.

It was Dick Dayton who brought him the news. As he listened, he felt something as he did that first day in the cañon when the sun got too strong for him. He thought, after Dayton left him, that he should have given up the game then and there, if it had not been for some blasting he was to do in the morning. The holes were all drilled, and it would be a day's job to clear away the pieces and straighten things out at that point. He should hate to have another man go on with the job. They might cut him out with Dorothy,—that was sure to come, sooner or later,—but, by the Great Horn Spoon! they should not get his job away from him!

It was not until he had turned in for the night that it occurred to him that he had not asked whom Dorothy was engaged to. What did he care, any way? he said to himself. He had gambled away his chances long ago. Yet, Good Heavens, how dear she was! As he lay on the ground, outside the little lean-to, star-

ing up at the stars that glittered in the thin air with what is called, at lower altitudes, a frosty brilliance, he seemed to see her before him more plainly than he had ever done in the old days when they had stood face to face. He had been too self-absorbed, too blinded and bewildered with the urgency of his own case, to see her as she really was. He remembered now,—something that he had never thought about before,—the little toss of her hair, up from her forehead, which was different from the way other girls wore their hair. It made a little billow there, that was like her free spirit. Yes, she had always had a free spirit. Perhaps it was the claim of ownership he had made, which had repelled her so strongly. As well set up a claim of ownership over those stars up there !

He tried to hope that the other fellow was man enough to deserve her ; but that was beyond his magnanimity. The only way to bear it, for the present at least, was to leave the "other fellow" out of the question. He was glad he did not know his name. And all night long, as he watched the stars, their slow, imperceptible progress marked only by the intervening tree-twigs, Dorothy's face was fairly visible to him, her voice came to him

distinct as an echo; her sweet, free nature unfolded itself to his awakened consciousness.

Since then he had worked as if his life had depended upon it, and now, after those ten days of fierce labor, his "job" was almost done. He had worked his way well up into the cañon, quite to the end of the distance contracted for. A few days more would complete the job. He thought, with a pang of regret, that his lines would never again fall in such glorious places. He knew the cañon by heart; he had seen it in every phase of its summer beauty, by day and by night, in sunshine and in storm, and now the autumn had come and the sensitive green of the aspens had turned to yellow. They gleamed along the brook-side; they showed like an outcrop of gold on the wall of rock over there, and in among the blue-green pines; their yellow leaves strewed the ground on which he stood. It was eight o'clock in the morning, and he was about to do his last blasting. There was nobody up the cañon, and nobody was likely to come from below for an hour yet. The big boulder was not to thrust itself into the road any more; another minute, and all that protruding side of it would be blown off and there would be room for two teams to pass each other. Hark! Was not

that a horse's hoofs down below? He was already in the act of "touching her off," holding the lighted match in the hollow of his two hands. As he turned his head to listen, the fuse ignited with a sharp *spit!* scorching and blackening the palms of his hands, and causing him to jump as violently as he used to do before his nerves were trained to the business. Somewhat disgusted with his want of nerve, he picked up his tools in a particularly leisurely manner, and deposited them at a safe distance from the coming crash. Then, to make up for this bit of bravado, he ran swiftly down the road,—"walluped" he said to himself, thinking of Loretty's father,—and when he espied the horse, he shouted and waved his arms in warning.

The horse stopped, and Wakefield slackened his pace. The moment he had done so he recognized the rider. He was not conscious of any surprise at seeing Dorothy Ray riding, all by herself, up the cañon. He did not pause to question as to how she got there, to wonder what she would think of him, turned day-laborer. He felt nothing but an absolute content and satisfaction in having her there before him ; it seemed so natural and so right that he did not see how it could have been otherwise !

He strode down the road to where she stood, and as she dropped the bridle and held out both hands to him, he flung his old hat away and clasped them in his powder-blackened palms.

"O Harry!" she cried with a joyful ring in her voice; "I never was so glad to see anybody in my life!"

He did not say one word, but as he stood there, bareheaded, there was a look in his face that gave her pause. Had she been too forward? Was he so changed? She drew her hands away, and taking up the bridle, looked uncertainly from side to side.

"Are n't we friends any more, Harry? Are n't you glad to see me?" she asked. Her voice was unsteady like her look. He had never seen her like this.

"Glad to see you, Dorothy?" he cried. "You seem like an angel straight from Heaven, only a hundred thousand million times better!"

A sudden explosion boomed out, putting a period to this emphatic declaration. Wakefield seized the rein of the startled horse, that sprang shivering to one side; but Dorothy only said, quite composedly: "I suppose you were blasting up there. Will there be another?"

"No; but how did you know it was I?"

"Why, I knew all about it, of course. Fanny told me, and Mrs. Dick Dayton wrote home, and,—well, I knew about it a great deal better than anybody else!"

"And you knew I was up here?"

"Of course I did! Why, else, should I have come up at daybreak?"

"But, Dorothy," Wakefield persisted, determined to make a clean breast of it at the outset. "Did you know I had made a fizzle of everything out here?"

"I knew you had lost your money," she replied, with an air of misprizing such sordid considerations. "And Fanny told me you were going to California, and,—I just thought I would come out with the Dennimans!" she added irrelevantly.

He was walking beside her horse up the broad clean road he had once taken such pride in;—ages ago he thought it must have been. On either hand, the solemn cliffs, familiars of the past three months, stood decked with gleaming bits of color; the brook went careering in their shadow, calling and crooning its little tale. What was that over yonder under the big pine-tree? Only a pair of bright eyes, that twinkled curiously, then vanished in a

whisking bit of fur! On a sudden he had become estranged and disassociated from these intimate surroundings, these sights and sounds which had so long been his companions. What had they to do with Dorothy!

She was telling him of her journey out and of the friends she was travelling with. She would have given him the home news, but, "Don't talk about anybody but yourself, Dorothy," he said. "That 's all that I care about!"

At last they stood fronting the big boulder, whose side had been blasted off. Dorothy looked at the fragments of stone strewing the road, and at the massive granite surface, now withdrawn among the pine-trees. One huge branch, broken by a flying rock, hung down across its face. The whole scene told of the play of tremendous forces, and Wakefield's was the hand that had controlled and directed them. Obedient to long habit, he stooped, and lifting a good-sized fragment, sent it crashing down the bank into the brook.

"How strong you are, Harry!" she said.

There was something in the way she said it, that made him feel that he must break the spell, then and there, or he should be playing the mischief with his own peace of mind. Yet

he was conscious of a strange absence of conviction, as he asked abruptly : " Dorothy, whom are you going to marry ? "

So he had heard that foolish gossip, and that was why there was that look in his face !

She was too generous to think of herself, too sure, indeed, of him and of herself, to weigh her words. With the little, half-defiant toss of the head he knew so well, yet gathering up the reins as if for instant flight, she said :

" I should think that was for you to say, Harry ! "

XII.

THE BLIZZARD PICNIC.

"AH, there, Mr. Burns! Glad to see you! This is what we call real Colorado weather!"

The speaker, a mercurial youth of two and twenty, was one of a group of young people assembled, some on horseback, some in yellow buckboards, in front of a stately Springtown mansion.

"Nothing conceited about us!" a girlish voice retorted. "I am sure you understand by this time, Mr. Burns, that Colorado is a synonym for perfection."

The new-comer laughed appreciatively as he drew rein close beside the girl, who sat her part-thoroughbred with the ease and grace of life-long habit.

"I had learned my lesson pretty well before I came out, thanks to you," the young man answered, in a tone that was a trifle over-significant.

The girl flushed, whether from pleasure or annoyance, it was impossible for the looker-on to decide. The looker-on—and his name, as usual, was legion,—had found no lack of occupation since the arrival on the field, some two weeks previous, of the Rev. Stephen Burns. Although the young minister was staying at the hotel, like any other chance tourist, there could be no question as to the object of his visit, for he passed most of his waking hours, either under Dr. Lovejoy's roof, or in the society of the doctor's daughter. The fact that Amy Lovejoy tolerated such assiduous attendance boded ill for Springtown, yet so cheerful is the atmosphere of the sunny-hearted little community, that foregone conclusions of an unwelcome character carry but scant conviction to its mind. Springtown could not spare Amy Lovejoy, therefore Springtown would not be called upon to do so.

By this time the group was twenty strong, a truly gala assemblage, which might have blocked the way on a less generous thoroughfare. On the broad expanse of Western Avenue, however, no picnic party, however numerous, was likely to interfere with traffic.

They were all young people, the chaperone of the occasion, a bride of twenty, looking, as

she was, one of the very youngest. The brilliant February day gleamed like a jewel upon the proud and grateful earth. The sky was one glorious arch of tingling blue, beneath which the snowy peaks shone with a joyful glitter. The air had the keen, dry sparkle that is sometimes compared to champagne, greatly to the advantage of that pleasant beverage. In short, it was a real Colorado day, and these young people were off on a real Colorado picnic. How exceptionally characteristic the occasion might prove to be, no one suspected, simply because no one payed sufficient heed to a shred of gray vapor that hovered on the brow of the Peak. Amy Lovejoy, to be sure, remarked that there would be wind before night, and another old resident driving by, waved his hat toward the Peak, and cried, "Look out for hurricanes!" But no one was the wiser for that.

The last packages of good things, the last overcoat and extra wrap, were stowed away under the seats of the yellow buckboards; the mercurial youth, Jack Hersey by name, had cried, for the last time, "Are we ready,—say, *are* we ready?" Elliot Chittenden's restive bronco, known as "my nag," had cut its last impatient caper; and off they started, a gay

holiday throng, passing down the Avenue to the tune of jingling harness and chattering voices and ringing hoofs. From a south porch on the one hand, and a swinging gate on the other, friends called a cheery greeting ; elderly people jogging past in slow buggies, met the pleasure-seekers with a benignant smile ; foot-passengers turned and waved their wide sombreros, and over yonder the Peak beamed upon them, with never a hint of warning ; for the gray vapor hovering there was far too slight a film to cast a shadow upon that broad and radiant front.

"It makes one think of the new Jerusalem, and the walls of Walhalla, and every sort of brilliant vision," Stephen Burns remarked, as his horse and Amy's cantered side by side, a little apart from the others.

"Yes," said Amy, looking absently before her ; "I suppose it does." And she wondered, as she had done more than once in the past two weeks, why she could not enter more responsively into the spirit of his conversation. She knew, and she would once have considered it a fact of the first importance, that to Stephen Burns the New Jerusalem was not more sacred than the abode of the ancient gods,—or, to be more accurate, Walhalla was not less beauti-

ful and real than the sacred city of the Hebrews. Each had its own significance and value in his estimation, as a dream, an aspiration of the human mind.

It was what seemed to Amy Lovejoy the originality and daring of the young minister's views of things high and low, which had at first fascinated the girl. She had never before met with just that type of thinker,—indeed she had never before associated on equal terms with any thinker of any type whatever !—and it was perhaps no wonder that she had been inclined to identify the priest with his gospel, that she had been ready to accept both with equal trust. In fact, nothing but her father's cautious reluctance had deterred her from pledging herself, four months ago, to this grave-eyed cavalier, riding now so confidently by her side.

She was her father's only child, and since the death of her mother, some ten years previous to this, she had been called upon to fill the important position of "apple of the eye" to a secretly adoring, if somewhat sarcastic parent.

"Your parson may be all very well," the doctor had written, "but if he is worth having he will keep ! He must have the advantage of extreme youth, to be taken with a callow

chick like yourself, but that shall not injure him in my eyes. Tell him to wait a while, and then come and show himself. Two heads are better than one in most of the exigencies of life, and when he comes, you and I can make up our minds about him at our leisure."

The girl's mind had reverted, *à propos* of nothing, to that concluding sentence of her father's letter, which she had read at the time with an indulgent but incredulous smile. Presently she became aware that her companion was speaking again.

"It is all one," he was saying. "What we see and what we imagine; what we aspire to, and what has been the aspiration of other men in other ages. And how *good* it all is!"

This he added with a certain turn and gesture which made the words intensely personal. Why did they repel her so strongly, she wondered, and wondering, she failed to answer. Involuntarily she had slackened her horse's pace, and fallen in line with the others, and when Jack Hersey rode up at that moment, she gave him a look of welcome which had the effect of making him more mercurial than ever for the rest of the day.

"I say, Amy," he cried; "is n't this a dandy day?" and Amy felt herself on good,

homely, familiar ground, and she answered him with a heart grown suddenly light as his own.

Stephen Burns, meanwhile, rode on beside her, with no very distinct misgiving in his mind. He had, to be sure, been somewhat daunted once or twice before, by a curious, intermittent asperity in her, which he could not quite account for. Yet why should he expect to account for every changing mood in this uniquely charming being? Had he not perceived from the beginning that she was not fashioned quite after the usual pattern?

They had met, the previous autumn, in the quaint old New England town where his people lived. She had come like a bit of the young West into the staid, old-fashioned setting of the place, and he had rejoiced in every trait that distinguished her from the conventional young lady of his acquaintance. Today, as they rode side by side toward the broad-bosomed mountain to the southward, he told himself once more that her nature was like this Colorado atmosphere, in its absolute clearness and crispness. Such an air,—bracing, stinging, as it sometimes was,—could never turn really harsh and easterly; neither, perhaps, could it ever take on the soft languor of

the summer sea. And Amy Lovejoy's nature would always have the finer, more individual quality of the high, pure altitude in which she had been reared. Possibly Stephen Burns had yet something to learn about that agreeable climate with which he was so ready to compare his love. The weather had been perfect since he came to Colorado. How could he suspect the meaning of a tiny wisp of vapor too slight to cast a visible shadow?

And Amy chatted gaily on with Jack Hersey, as they cantered southward, while Stephen Burns, riding beside them, told himself with needless reiteration, that he was well content. One reason for content he certainly had at that moment, for he was a good horseman, as an accomplished gentleman is bound to be, and he was never quite insensible to the exhilaration of that delicious, rhythmic motion.

They had passed through a gate which signified that the rolling acres of prairie on either hand, the winding road that lost itself in the distance, the pine-clad slope to the right, were all but a part of a great ranch. Herds of cattle were doubtless pastured within that enclosure, though nowhere visible to the holiday party riding and driving over their

domain. Hundreds of prairie-dog holes dotted the vast field on either hand, and here and there one of the odd little fraternity scampered like a ball of gray cotton across the field, or sat erect beside his hole, barking shrilly, before vanishing, with a whisk of the tail, from sight. Stephen took so kindly to the little show, and made such commonplace exclamations of pleasure, that Amy felt a sudden relieved compunction and smiled upon him very graciously.

"They are not a bit like what I expected," he said; "but they are such self-important, conceited little chaps that you can't help having a fellow-feeling with them!"

"Hullo! There 's a give-away!" Jack Hersey shouted; and he turned and repeated the remark for the benefit of a buckboard in the rear. Amy thought Jack very stupid and silly, and in her own heart, she promptly ranged herself on the side of her young minister. There was nothing subtle or elusive about her changes of mood, and Stephen profited by each relenting. For a few blissful moments, accordingly, he now basked in the full consciousness of her favor.

They continued for half an hour on the ranch road, rising and dipping from point to

point, yet mounting always higher above the great plain below. There the prairie stretched away, a hundred miles to the East and South, with never a lake nor a forest to catch the light, with not a cloud in the sky to cast a shadow. Yet over the broad, undulating expanse were lines and patches of varying color, changing and wavering from moment to moment, like mystic currents and eddies upon a heaving, tide-swept sea. Amy watched her companion furtively, ready to take umbrage at any lack of proper appreciation on his part; for this was what she liked best in all Colorado, this vast, mysterious prairie sea. Yet when she saw by Stephen's face that the spell had touched him too, when she noted the rapt gaze he sent forth, as he left his horse to choose his own way, she felt annoyed, unreasoningly, perversely annoyed. Somehow his look was too rapt, he was taking it too solemnly, he was too much in earnest! She had a longing to touch up her horse and gallop off to some spot where she might be unmolested, where she might think her own thoughts and receive her own impressions without seeing them accentuated, exaggerated in another person. There had never been any one before who seemed to feel just as she did about that view, and some-

how she resented this intrusion upon what seemed like her own preserve.

Of course there was but one explanation of all this high-strung sensitiveness in a healthy, natural girl like Amy Lovejoy. She had made a mistake, and she was finding it out. In those autumn days in the little New England town, she had fallen captive to an idea, a theory of life, a certain poetical incentive and aspiration ; for months she had fed her imagination upon this new experience, and suddenly Stephen Burns had come, and by his personal presence asserted a personal claim. She had been unconsciously ignoring the personal element in their relation, which had, in the months of separation, become very indefinite and unreal to her. She had told her father that Stephen's eyes were brown, and she found that they were blue ; she had described him as being tall, and he had turned out to be rather below the medium height ; she had forgotten what his voice was like, and it seemed oppressively rich and full.

"Better look out for your horse, Mr. Burns!" she said curtly. "He almost took a header a minute ago."

"Did he?" said Stephen. "I did not notice. This is the view you told me about, is it not?"

"Very likely," she returned, with affected indifference. "We Colorado people always do a good deal of bragging when we are in the East. We wear all our little descriptions and enthusiasms threadbare."

"There was nothing threadbare about your account," Stephen protested. "It was almost as vivid as the sight itself."

"We take things more naturally when we get back to them. Come, Jack, let's go faster!"

There was a level stretch of road before them, and the two young people were off with a rush. Stephen knew that the livery horse he rode could never keep up with them, even had his pride allowed him to follow uninvited. He had a dazed, hurt feeling, which was not more than half dispelled when, a few minutes later he came up with the truants, resting their horses at the top of a sudden dip in the road.

"Who got there first?" called a voice from one of the buckboards.

"Amy, of course. You don't suppose Cigarette would pass a lady!"

"Jacky would n't 'cause he could n't!" Amy quoted. "Poor Cigarette," she added, descending to prose again, and tapping Cigarette's nose with the butt of her riding-crop.

"How he did heave and pant when he caught up with us! And Sunbeam never turned a hair!"

"What made you call him Sunbeam?" Stephen asked, with an effort to appear undisturbed, as he watched her stroking the glossy black neck.

"Because he was n't yellow," she answered shortly; upon which somebody laughed.

They picknicked in a sunny opening among the scrub-oaks, on the edge of a hollow through which a mountain brook had made its way. There was snow in the hollow, and a thin coating of ice on the brook. A few rods away, the horses, relieved of their bridles, were enjoying their dinners, switching their sides with their tails from time to time, as if the warm sun had wakened recollections of summer flies. Amy sat on the outskirts of the company, where Sunbeam could eat from her hand; a privilege he was accustomed to on such occasions. One of the men had brought a camera, and he took a snap-shot at the entire company, just as they had grouped themselves on the sunny slope. Amy and Sunbeam were conspicuous in the group, but when, some days later, the plate was developed, it was found that Mr. Stephen Burns did not appear in the photograph. Amy

was the only one not surprised at the omission. He had been sitting beside her, and she was aware that he leaned on his elbow and got out of sight, just as the snap-shot was taken. She wondered at the time why he did so, but she found that she did not greatly care to know the reason.

A few minutes later, just as the girls of the party were busy dipping the cups and spoons into the edge of the snow,—the sun so hot on their shoulders that they quite longed to get into the shade, Elliot Chittenden came hurrying back from a short excursion out to the edge of the slope, to tell them of a wicked-looking cloud in the north. The brow of the hill had shut off the view in that direction, the faithful barometer, the Peak, having long since been lost sight of.

There was a sudden hurry and commotion, for all knew the menace of a storm from the north, and that its coming is often as swift as it is sharp. No one was better aware of the situation than Amy.

"Put your overcoat on to begin with," she said to Burns; "and get your horse. I'll see to Sunbeam." The bridle was already fast on the pretty black head as she spoke, but it was some time before Burns came up. He had mis-

laid his bridle, and when he found it he fumbled unaccountably. His fingers apparently shared the agitation of his mind; an agitation which was something new in his experience, and which made him feel singularly at odds with everything, even with impersonal straps and buckles! When at last he came, she put her foot in his hand and went up like a bird to a perch.

"Everybody has got ahead of us," she said, as they put their horses into a canter.

The sun was still hot upon them, but down below, the plains were obscured as with a fog.

"What is that?" he asked.

"A dust-storm. Can you make your horse go faster?"

"Not, and keep the wind in him."

"Never mind, we shall do very well."

They had come about the brow of the mountain now, and could see the great black cloud to the north. It looked pretty ugly, even to Stephen Burns's unaccustomed eyes.

"What do you expect?" he asked, as they walked their horses down a sharp descent.

"It may be only wind, but there is likely to be snow at this season. If we can only get out of the ranch we're all right; the prairie-dog holes make it bad when you can't see."

"Can't see?" he repeated.

"Yes," she answered impatiently. "Of course you can't see *in a blizzard!*"

A moment later a blinding cloud of sand struck them with such force that both the horses slewed sharp about and stood an instant, trembling with the shock. As they turned to the north again, a few flakes of snow came flying almost horizontally in their faces and then—the storm came!

Horses and riders bent their heads to the blast, and on they went. It had suddenly grown bitterly cold.

"I wish you would take my coat," said Stephen, fumbling at the buttons as he had fumbled at the bridle. His teeth were chattering as he spoke.

"Nonsense!" Amy answered sharply. "You 'll feel this ten times as much as I."

The snow was collecting in Stephen's beard, freezing as it fell, and making fantastic shapes there; the top of Amy's hat was a white cone, stiff and sharp as if it were carved in stone.

They could not see a rod before them, but they found it easier to breathe now.

"Is n't it splendid, the way one rouses to it!" Amy exclaimed. "I 'm getting all heated up from the effort of breathing!"

There was no answer.

"Don't you like it?" she asked, taking a look at his set face.

"Like it? With you out in it!"

That was all he said, but Amy felt her cheeks tingle under the dash of snow that clung to them. The answer came like a rude check to the exultant thrill which had prompted her words.

"He does n't understand in the least!" she thought, impatiently, and it was all she could do to refrain from spurring on her horse and leaving him in the lurch as she had done once before, that day. He was faint-hearted, pusillanimous! What if it were only for her sake that he feared? All the worse for him! She did not want his solicitude; it was an offence to her!

The wind whistled past them, and the snow beat in their faces; the shapes in his beard grew more and more fantastic, the white cone on her hat grew taller, and then broke and tumbled into her lap; the horses bent their heads, all caked with snow, and cantered pluckily on.

They had passed the gate of the ranch, leaving it open behind them, and now there were but a couple of miles between them and the

town. The snow was so blinding that they did not see a group of buckboards and saddle-horses under a shed close at hand, nor guess that some of the party had found shelter in a house near by. They rode swiftly on, gaining in speed as they approached the town. The horses were very close together, straining, side by side, toward the goal. Amy's right hand lay upon her knee, the stiff fingers closed about the riding-crop. If she had thought about it at all, she would have said that her hand was absolutely numb. Suddenly, with a shock, she felt another hand close upon it, while the words, "*my darling!*" vibrated upon her ear; the voice was so close that it seemed to touch her cheek. She started as if she had been stung.

"Oh, my riding-crop!" she cried, letting the handle slip from her grasp.

"I beg your pardon," Stephen gasped, in a low, pained tone. "If you will wait an instant, I will get it for you!"

He turned his horse about, for they had passed the spot by several lengths.

Sunbeam stood for a moment, obedient to his rider's hand, while Amy watched the storm close in about her departing cavalier. As he vanished from view, a sudden, overpowering

impulse of flight seized her. Without daring to think of what she was doing, she bent down and whispered "*go!*" in the low sharp tone that Sunbeam knew. He was off like a shot.

"I don't care, I don't care," the girl said to herself, over and over again, as they bounded forward in the teeth of the storm. "Better now than later!"

She wondered whether Stephen would kill his horse endeavoring to overtake her; she wondered whether he would ever overtake her again! Somehow it seemed to her as if the storm had caught her up bodily and were bearing her away from a very perplexing world. After all, what an amenable, unexacting sort of thing a blizzard was! How very easy to deal with! You had only to duck your head, and screw up your eyes, and cleave your way through it, and on it went, quite unconcerned with your moods and tenses! If Stephen Burns were only more like that, she thought to herself! But, alas! poor Stephen, with all his strong claims to affection and esteem, could not assert the remotest kinship with the whistling winds and blinding snow which were proving such formidable rivals!

A narrow lane appeared at her right. Almost before she was aware that it was there, she had

swung Sunbeam about; in another moment they were standing, with two other saddle-horses, in a little grove of trees, further protected by a small house close at hand. It seemed almost warm in that sheltered nook. Amy recognized the horses and knew that Harry de Luce and one of the girls must have taken refuge within.

The lane was a short one, and she and Sunbeam stood, trembling with excitement, until they say the shadow of a horse and rider speeding along the road toward the town. Then Amy drew a long breath of relief. "It was all nothing but a shadow," she said to herself, "and I went and thought it was real!"

She slid stiffly down from the saddle and hobbled into the house, all the exultation gone from her bounding veins. It made her a bit dizzy to think of the rush of tumultuous emotions which had outvied the storm of the elements but now. By the time the friendly hostess had established her before the kitchen stove and taken away her dripping hat and coat, she felt too limp and spent to answer the eager questions that were asked.

"Do something for Sunbeam," she murmured weakly to Harry de Luce, in answer to his ready offers of help.

"They 're going to send out a 'bus with four horses to pick up the remnants," de Luce assured her. "If you girls will go in the 'bus I will lead Sunbeam and Paddy home." And somehow it seemed so pleasant to be taken care of, just in a group with another girl and two horses, that Amy, with a faint, assenting smile, submitted to be classed with the "remnants."

She felt as if she were half asleep when, an hour or more later, she sat in the corner of the great omnibus, that went lurching along through the snow, like a mudscow gone astray among ocean waves. She had an idea that everybody was talking at once, but that was just as well, since not a syllable was audible above the creaking and rattling of the big ark.

Arrived at home she found the riding-crop, but no Stephen. He had called an hour ago, to ask if she had arrived safely, but he had said nothing about coming again.

"If he has an atom of spirit he will never come near me again," Amy thought to herself. And then; "Oh, that dear blizzard!" she exclaimed under her breath.

Sunbeam, she learned, had arrived before her. Thomas Jefferson, the black stable-man, reported him as partaking of a sumptuous supper with unimpaired relish. The thought of

her favorite, crunching his feed in the stall close at hand, gave her a sense of companionship as she ate her own solitary meal. Her father had been called in consultation to a neighboring town and would not return until the following day.

After supper Amy curled herself up in an easy-chair under the drop-light, and opened a new novel which she had been longing to read, ever since Stephen Burns's arrival. She thought with strong disapproval of the manner in which he had been taking possession of her time for two weeks past. She looked at the clock ; it was half-past-eight.

"Well ! that 's over with !" she thought, with a half guilty pang of conviction.

Somehow the novel was not as absorbing as she had anticipated. She let it drop on her lap, and sat for awhile listening to the storm outside, as she reviewed this strange, unnatural episode of half-betrothal which had turned out so queerly.

A sharp ring at the telephone in the adjoining room broke in upon her revery. She hastened to answer it. It was an inquiry from the livery-stable for Mr. Stephen Burns. He had not brought the horse back, nor had he returned to his hotel. Did Miss Lovejoy per-

haps know of his whereabouts? Did she think they had better send out a search-party?

Miss Lovejoy knew nothing of his whereabouts, and she was strongly of the opinion that he had better be looked up. As she still stood listening at the telephone, her heart knocking her ribs in a fierce fright, she heard a voice in a distant stable, not intended for her ears, say: "Not much use to search! If he ain't under cover he ain't alive." Upon which the heart ceased, for several seconds, its knocking at the ribs, and Amy Lovejoy knew how novel-heroines feel, when they are described as growing gray about the lips.

She could not seem to make the telephone tube fit in its ring, and after trying to do so once or twice, she left it hanging by the cord, and went and opened the front door and stood on the veranda. It did not seem to her especially cold, but over there, in the light that streamed from the parlor window, the snow lay drifted into a singular shape, that looked as if it might cover a human form. She shuddered sharply and went into the house again. From time to time she telephoned to the stable. They had sent a close carriage out with a doctor and two other passengers, and Elliot Chittenden had gone in an open buckboard with

a driver. By and by the buckboard had come back and another party had gone out in it. Then the carriage had returned and gone forth again with fresh horses and a fresh driver.

She played a good deal with the riding-crop during the evening, and now and then she went outside the door and took a look at the weird, shroud-like shape, there in the light of the window. Once she stepped up to it and pushed the riding-crop in, to its full length, just to make sure that there was nothing under the snow. After that she took the riding-crop in and dried it carefully on a towel.

Before she knew it the evening was far gone, and all but one carriage had returned.

"Guess Jim's turned in at some ranch," came the word from the livery-stable. "He'll be ready to start out again as soon as it's light."

If the evening had not seemed so miraculously short, Amy could not have forgiven herself for having been so slow in arriving at her own plan of action. As it was, the clock had struck twelve, before she found herself clothed in two or three knit and wadded jackets under a loose old seal-skin sack, crossing the yard to the stable door. The maids had long since gone to bed, and Thomas Jefferson was a mile away, under his own modest roof.

Presently, with a clatter of hoofs, Sunbeam came forth from the stable door, bearing on his back, a funny, round, dumpy figure, very unlike in its outlines to the slender form which usually graced that seat. The gallant steed was still further encumbered by a fur-lined great coat of the doctor's, strapped on behind, its pockets well stocked with brandy flask and biscuits.

The storm had much abated, and there was already a break in the clouds over yonder. The air was intensely cold, but the wind had quite died down. Sunbeam took the road at a good pace, for he had a valiant spirit and would have scorned to remember the day's fatigues. His rider sat, a funny little ball of fur, looking neither to the right nor to the left. Stephen was nowhere on the open road ; that was sure, for he was far too good a horseman to come to grief out there. There was but one place to look for him, and that was among the prairie-dog holes. She had told him of the danger there was among them, and he would have hastened there the moment he believed that she was lost.

Amy did not do very much thinking as she rode along ; she did not analyze the feeling that drove her forth to the rescue. She only

knew that she and she alone was responsible for any harm that might have come to one whose only fault was that he had taken her at her word ; and that she would cheerfully break her own neck and Sunbeam's,—even Sunbeam's ! for the sake of rescuing him.

The storm had ceased entirely now, and just as she reached the ranch gate, which had swung half to on its hinges and was stuck there in the snow, the moon came out and revealed the wide white expanse, unbroken by any sign of the road. She felt sure that the search-parties would have followed the road as closely as possible and that they would have tried not to stray off into the field. But that was just where Stephen Burns, mindful of the perils she had described to him, would naturally have turned. She blew the whistle in the end of her riding-crop, once, twice, three times. The sound died away in the wide echoless spaces. Then cautiously, slowly, she made Sunbeam feel his way across the snow. The moon was still riding among heavy clouds, but now and then it shone forth and flooded with light the broad white field, casting a sharp-cut, distorted shadow of horse and rider upon the snow.

Once or twice she stopped, and blew the whistle and hallooed, and each time the weird

silence closed in again like an impenetrable veil. Sometimes she became impatient of her slow progress, but she knew too well the dangers of a misstep to risk the chance of success by any lack of caution. Even in her anxiety and distress of mind, she marked the intelligence with which Sunbeam picked his way, testing the firmness of each spot on which he trod, as if he had known the danger.

Presently they began the ascent of a long narrow ridge beyond which she knew there were no holes. As they paused for a moment on the crest, looking down into the moonlit hollow, she raised the riding-crop to her lips, and blew a long, shrill whistle; and promptly as an echo a voice returned the signal. Following the direction of the sound, her eyes discerned a dark shadow in the hollow forty rods away. She put Sunbeam into a canter, and as she approached the shadow, the outline defined itself, and she saw that it was a ruinous shed or hut.

"Hulloo!" came the voice again, and this time it was unmistakeably Stephen's.

A hundred yards from the shed, Sunbeam shied violently. Looking to one side, she beheld in the shadow of a mass of scrub-oaks the body of a horse lying stark and still. Close

beside the head was a dark spot in the snow.

A moment later she had dismounted and was standing within the rickety hut, looking down upon another shadowy form that moved and spoke.

"Are you hurt?" she asked.

"Not much. I believe I have sprained my ankle. But the poor nag is done for," he added sorrowfully.

"Which foot have you hurt?"

"The right one."

"That's good. Then you can ride side-saddle. Are you sure that is all?"

He was already consuming brandy and biscuit at a rate to dissipate all immediate anxiety.

"Yes; and I declare it 's worth it!" he cried with enthusiasm; a statement which, if slightly ambiguous, conveyed a cheerful impression.

"Did the fall kill the horse?" Amy asked, with a little quiver in her voice, of pity for the poor beast.

"No; I thought it best to cut an artery for him. Poor boy! He floundered terribly before he went down."

"What threw him?"

"Something in the way of a branch or a piece of timber. Lucky it happened where it

did," he added. "I could n't have gone far looking for shelter."

"Poor old nag!" said Amy. Then, perceiving that she had not been altogether polite: "Are n't you nearly frozen?" she asked.

"No, it 's very snug in here. Some other tramp must have been here before me, and got these leaves together. There 's lots of warmth in them."

By this time Stephen had crawled out from among the oak-leaves and, having got himself into the doctor's fur-lined coat, stood on one foot, leaning heavily against the door-frame.

"A splendid night, is n't it?" he remarked in a conversational tone.

Amy, who was just leading Sunbeam up to the doorway, glanced at the young man, standing there in the bright moonlight,—at his sensitive, intelligent face, his finely-modelled head and brow,—and somehow she felt reinstated with herself. She had been fatally wrong in making choice so lightly, but at least the choice was, in itself, nothing to be ashamed of! As she helped Stephen in his painful transit to the saddle, she wondered if she were really a heartless person to take comfort in such a thought. But, in truth, since she had come to question the genuineness of her own part in

their relation, she had lost faith in his share as well. There must have been something wrong about it from the beginning, and certainly, she reasoned, if she had lost interest in so admirable a being as he, it was not to be expected that he would be more constant to a trifling sort of person like herself. There was only a little awkwardness to be got over at first, but sooner or later he would bless her for his escape.

Stephen, meanwhile, was submitting to all her arrangements with neither protest nor suggestion. She had undertaken to rescue him, and she must do it in her own way. If he hated to see her ploughing through the snow by the side of the horse, he made no sign. If he would rather have been left to his fate than to have subjected her to exposure and fatigue, he was too wise to say so. Her wilfulness had been so thoroughly demonstrated in the course of that day that he merely observed her with an appreciation half amused, half admiring.

"There is a house just beyond the gate where we can go," she said; and then she did not speak again for many minutes.

As for her companion, he seemed inclined at first to be as taciturn as she. Whether or not he was suffering agony from his foot, she had

no means of knowing, nor could she guess how he interpreted her own action. At last he broke the silence.

"Of course you meant to give me the slip," he said. "I half knew it all the time. I suppose that was the very reason why I persisted in acting as if I thought you had ridden back for me. One clings all the harder to one's illusions when,—well, when it 's all up with them."

Amy could not seem to think of any suitable remark to make in reply.

They had reached the ranch road now. She knew the general lay of the land well enough to recognize it, and she could trust Sunbeam to keep it. A dense black cloud, the rear-guard of the storm, had covered the moon, but there were stars enough to light the way somewhat.

"Would you mind telling me why you risked your life for me?" Stephen asked abruptly.

Some seconds went by before she answered. Then: "I think there was reason enough in my being to blame for it all," she said; "I behaved outrageously."

"And the other reason? There was another reason, I take it."

His voice was not eager, not lover-like; there

was more curiosity than anything else in the tone. Again the moon shone out, and lighted up her face distinctly, as she answered him, looking straight before her along the snowy road.

"I think," she said, speaking with a slow consideration of her words; "I think it was because I could not bear to have you—go out of the world, believing—what was not true! It seemed like a deceit going over into eternity!"

Would he say something very dreadful in reply, she wondered; something that would haunt her for the rest of her days?

She was still bracing herself for the worst,—for he had not yet broken the silence,—when they came to the gate, fixed there, half closed. There was just room for Sunbeam to pass out, and Amy fell behind for a moment. Stephen drew rein and waited for her, while she vainly tried to close the gate.

"Don't mind that?" he said. "It will close of itself when the snow melts."

She came obediently and walked beside him. They had turned aside from the direction of Springtown, toward a little house a few rods away. They were almost there when Stephen spoke again.

"You must be sorry about it all," he said, "though you very wisely leave that to be understood. You have made a mistake and you think you have caused another person great and lasting unhappiness. I can't tell to-night whether that is so or not, but there is one thing that I think you have a right to know."

"And that is?" She felt that she must fill in the pause, for he evidently found it difficult to go on.

"I think I know you well enough," he said; "to be sure of your feeling about it, though it is different from what some people would have under the circumstances. But somehow I am sure that you will be glad to know, that when I thought I was going to perish in the storm,—after I was thrown, and before I had seen that there was shelter near by,—it was *not you* my thoughts were running on."

Again he paused while she lifted the latch of the little gate. Then, as Sunbeam passed through, and Amy walked by his side up the snowy path, Stephen said:

"I think it must have been a good many minutes that I lay there, thinking that the end was coming, and the only person in the world that I seemed to care about was—*my mother!*"

At the word, the bond that had irked her was gently loosed, and he, for his part, could only wonder that he felt no pain. The great cold moon-lit calm of the night seemed to enter into their hearts, swept clean by the storm. They looked into one another's faces in the solemn white light, with a fine new unconcern. Where were all their perplexities? What had it all been about?

It was as if the snow had melted, and the great gate had closed itself. Was it Paradise or Purgatory they had shut themselves out from?

XIII.

A GOLDEN VISTA.

TRAMP, tramp, tramp,—the heavy boots had sounded on the road,—tramp, tramp, tramp! since Sunday morning, and now it was Tuesday noon. Often for hours together there had been no witness to the steady march, save the lordly pine-trees, standing straight and grand in the mountain "parks," or scaling boldly the precipitate sides of the encroaching cliffs; the cliffs themselves, frowning sternly above the path; and always somewhere on the horizon, towering above the nearer hills or closing in the end of the valley, a snowy peak gleaming like a transcendent promise against the sky. Waldo Kean, as he strode steadily down from his father's mountain ranch toward a wonderful new future whose door was about to be flung wide to him, felt the inspiration of those rugged mountain influences, the like of which had been his familiars all the seventeen

years of his life. The chattering brooks had nothing to say to him as they came dashing down from the hills to join the rollicking stream whose course his path followed; the sunflowers, gilding the edge of the road, were but frills and furbelows to his thinking. But in the pine-trees there was a perfectly clear significance,—in those hardy growths, finding a foothold among the rocks, drawing sustenance from Heaven knew where, yet ever growing skyward, straight and tall and strong. As he passed among them, standing at gracious intervals in the broad "parks," they seemed to flush with understanding and sympathy. His way led from north to south and as often as he turned and looked back among the trees, the stems glowed ruddily and his heart warmed to them. He knew that it was merely the southern exposure that had tinged their bark and caused that friendly glow, but he liked it all the same.

Now and then the solitude was relieved by the appearance of a horseman riding with flapping arms and jingling spurs up the pass; or again the silence was broken by the inconsequent bleating of a flock of sheep wandering in search of their scant pasturage or huddling together, an agitated mass of grimy wool, its

outskirts painfully exposed to the sharp but well-intentioned admonitions of a somewhat irascible collie. Neither man nor beast took special note of the overgrown boy striding so confidently on his way, nor was one observer more likely than the other to guess what inspiring thoughts were animating the roughly clad, uncouth form. The boy's clothes were shabby and travel-stained, and over his shoulders was slung a canvas bag, its miscellaneous contents making sharp, angular protuberances on its surface. He had left the ranch with clothes and books enough to give the bag a pretty weight, and this he had unconcernedly increased by the insertion into the straining receptacle of many a "specimen" picked up by the way. For the eyes were keen and observant that looked out from under the strongly marked brows, and bits of fluorite and "fool's gold," and of rarer minerals as well, which had lain for years beside the road, noted as little by cowboy and ranchman and mountain tourist as by the redman whose feet first trod the pass, were destined to-day to start on their travels, enlisted in the service of Science.

It must have been a daring specimen indeed that should have thought of resisting its fate when it came at the hands of Waldo Kean.

There was a certain rough strength not only in the muscular frame, but in the face itself, with its rude features, its determined outlines, its heavy under-lip ; and in the stiff black hair roughly clipped on the ample skull, growing in a bushy thatch above the keen dark eyes. It seemed but natural that just that type of boy should feel himself drawn to the study of the rocky foundation of things.

Four years ago Waldo Kean had found out that he wanted to be a geologist, and that to this end he must go to college. Yet though the college was in Springtown, and though Springtown lies close to the foot of the " range," it had taken him four years to get there. During that enforced interval he had done his full share of the heavy ranch work, he had found one and another means of accumulating a little capital of his own ; at off hours and off seasons he had cudgelled his brain over books with ugly difficult titles and anything but tractable contents. In short he had fairly earned his passport, and now, at last, on this radiant October morning, he was striding over the few intervening miles that separated him from that wonderful Land of Promise, where Latin and Greek grew on every tree, and the air was electric with the secrets of Science itself. What won-

der that he was unconscious of hardship and fatigue, that he counted as nothing the three days' tramp ; the icy nights spent out under the chill stars ; the only half-satisfied hunger of a healthy boy, living on food which the dry mountain air was rapidly reducing to a powdery consistency ! He was going to College ; he was going to be a Geologist. What did he care for any paltry details by the way ?

He seated himself for his noon meal, the last crumbling sandwich of his store, at the foot of a big pine-tree, just where the pass narrows to a wide ravine. As he took out the slice of bread and meat neatly wrapped about with brown paper, his thoughts reverted with a certain sore compunction to the hand that had prepared it for him. It had been his mother's farewell service, and he somehow realized now as he had not realized at the time, how much all those careful preparations meant, to her and to himself. He remembered how, late Saturday night, she had sat mending a new rip in his best coat, and that when she pricked her finger, and a little bead of red blood had to be disposed of before she could go on with the work, he had wondered why women were always pricking their fingers when there was no need. It was not until the very moment of

departure that the pain of it seized him. His mother was a quiet, undemonstrative woman of the New England race, and if mother and son loved each other,—as it now transpired that they did,—no mention had ever been made of the fact on either side. The consequence was, that when, at parting, an iron hand seemed to be gripping the boy's throat, he had been so taken at unawares, that he had found it impossible to articulate a single word. On the mother's part there had been one little, half-suppressed sob that sounded in his ears yet. It left an ache in him that he did not at first know what to do with, but which clearly called for heroic treatment. Accordingly, after much pondering the situation, he had adopted a great resolution,—a resolution which involved no less arduous a task than that of writing a letter to his mother and telling her that he loved her. He thought it possible that the confession might give her pleasure, coming from a safe distance and involving no immediate consequences, and in any case he did not feel justified in keeping to himself a discovery which so nearly concerned another person. He had thought a good deal about the letter and of how he should approach the subject, and he had about decided to make the mo-

mentous statement in a postscript down in one corner and to sign it "Waldy."

He was so near his journey's end that he allowed himself rather a longer nooning than usual. He stretched himself on his back on the pine needles, and with his hands clasped behind his head, he gazed up through the spreading branches to the marvellous blue of the sky. When he should be a scientific man and know all sorts of things besides geology,—meteorology and chemistry and the like,—perhaps he should find out why the sky looked so particularly deep and palpitating when you were lying flat on your back and there were some pine branches in between. He meant, one of these days, to know everything there was to be known, and to discover a little something new besides.

A train of cars thundered by on the other side of the brook not thirty yards from his feet. He did not change his position, but looking down the long length of his legs, he saw the roaring, snorting beast of an engine rush by, trailing its tail of cars behind it.

"And yet the power is n't in the steam," he thought to himself, "but in the brain that controls it. Just the brain. That 's all." At the thought a sudden impatience seized

him to arrive at that goal where the brain takes command, and he sprang to his feet, and shouldering his pack, strode on down the pass. Tramp, tramp, tramp ! went the heavy boots ; the great bag weighed like lead across his shoulders ; a gnawing hunger had somehow got into him since he swallowed the crumbling bread and meat.

" The water was good, at any rate," he said to himself, glancing more appreciatively than before at the crystal stream that still raced on a level with the road. The way led across both brook and railroad just there, and there was a sharp turn in the walls of the cañon. He looked back and saw a train rushing down the pass, swiftly,—surreptitiously, it seemed, so curiously little noise did it make on the down-grade. An instant later he had turned the corner, and found himself face to face with a pair of horses harnessed to a buggy, trotting rapidly up the pass, straight toward that railroad crossing. They were already close upon him and he could see a man and woman seated in the buggy. He had only time to fling his pack to one side and wave his arms in warning, and then, his warning being unheeded, he sprang at the horses' heads and seized the bridles. The horses reared and plunged, there

was the sharp whistle of a whiplash, a stinging blow cut him across the face. The blood rushed to his head in a sudden fury, but instinctively he kept his hold upon the plunging horses. They had all but dragged him to the track when the train rushed by. The whole thing had happened in twenty seconds of time.

He dropped his hold and sprang to one side while the horses dashed on and tore round the projecting corner of rock, the buggy slewing wildly after them.

Waldo Kean stood an instant with clenched hands and crimson face, a straight welt standing out white and angry across his cheek. Then,—"Pooh! he muttered, "I'm going to college all the same!"—and he picked up his hat which the horses had trampled out of shape, shouldered his pack and strode on down the pass. His cheek was smarting with pain, but he was hardly aware of that; there was a yawning rip in the arm-hole of his coat, but that was of still less consequence. He had all he could do to attend to the conflicting emotions of the moment; the sense of outraged dignity contending, not very successfully, with a lively concern for the fate of those people he had tried to rescue. He thought it more than likely that they would both get killed, for the

horses were quite unmanageable when they disappeared around the corner, and he remembered an ugly bit of road just above that point. He was not a little disgusted with himself when he caught himself hoping that they might get out of the scrape alive. Well, if he could not "stay mad" longer than that, he told himself, he might as well forget the whole business and be on the look-out for specimens.

Meanwhile the pass was getting grander every moment; the brook was working its way deeper below the level of the road, while here and there in this sombre defile a splash of yellow aspen gleamed like living gold on the face of the precipice. The wild and beautiful gorge interested him in spite of himself; it disengaged his thoughts alike from his personal grievance, and from his dissatisfied contemplation of his own lack of proper vindictiveness. There was nothing grand like this in the neighborhood of the ranch. It was more like his father's description of the "Flume" and the "Notch," those natural wonders of the White Hills which Waldo Kean the elder liked to talk about. "When I was a boy over in New Hampshire," he used to say; and to the children it seemed as if "over

in New Hampshire" could not be more than a day's journey from the ranch.

"When I was a boy over in New Hampshire," he would say, "I got it into my head that if I could only get away to a new place I sh'd get to be something big; and the farther away I got, the bigger I expected to be. Colorado was a territory then, 'n I thought, 'f I could only get out here they 'd make me gov'nor 's like 's not. 'N I do' know but what I 'd have looked to be made President of the United States 'f I 'd sighted the Pacific Ocean!"

Then the shaggy, keen-eyed mountaineer who made so light of boyish expectations would knock the logs together and take a puff or two at his pipe before coming to the climax of his remarks, which varied according to the lesson he wished to inculcate.

"It took me several years of wrastling with life," he was fond of saying, "to find out that it ain't so much matter *whar* you be, as *what* you be. 'N if I was you, Waldy,"—here was the application,—"I 'd contrive to learn a little something on my own hook, before I aspired to go consorting with them as knows it all!"

When, however, the time was ripe, and "Waldy," having fulfilled these conditions, was fairly off for college, the ranchman had

signified his approval of his son's course by escorting him a few miles on his way. The boy had felt himself highly honored by the attention, yet when the time of parting came, it was with no such stricture about his throat as had taken him at unawares in the early morning, that he watched the tall form disappearing among the pine-trees. There was a certain self-sufficiency about the "old man,"—aged forty-five,—that precluded any embarrassing tenderness in one's relations with him.

Waldo was thinking of his father as he strode down the pass with that welt on his cheek. He had an idea that his father would not make so much of the affair as he was taking himself to task for not doing. And up to this time his father had been his standard. He not only had a very high opinion of him as he was, but he had a boyish faith in what he might have been, a belief that if he had had half a chance he would have made his mark in the world. He was glad that he bore his father's name, and he was quite determined to make it stand for something in the minds of men before he got through with it. It sounded like a name that was to be made to mean something.

Suddenly the sound of wheels coming down the pass struck his ear. They were the

wheels of a buggy, he thought, and of a buggy drawn by a pair of horses. The suggestion was distasteful to Waldo Kean just at that moment, and he quickened his pace somewhat. Presently the wheels stopped close behind him, a firm step sounded on the road, he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder. He looked up, and his worst forebodings were realized. It was the face he had caught sight of in that particular buggy which he did not like to think about, and the hand that rested on his shoulder was the one which had swung the whip to such good purpose.

A very hearty and pleasant voice was saying; "Do you know, I never did anything in all my life I was so sorry for!" but the boy strode on as stolidly as if he had been stone-deaf.

The other, though a man of heavy build, kept pace with him easily.

"You see," he remarked, after waiting a reasonable time for a reply; "I never knew what it was to owe any one so much as I owe you!"

Not being, in fact, stone-deaf, Waldo found himself obliged to make some response. As much from embarrassment as from anger, he spoke gruffly.

"That's nothing," he said. "I'd have done as much for a stray dog,—and like as not I'd have got bit all the same!"

His companion was making a study of him rather than of his words;—of the defiant pose of the head above the shabby, uncouth figure,—of the stormy eyes set in the fiery crimson of the face. He could not resent the rough words, but neither could he help being amused at the tragic exaggeration of the figure.

"Do you know, you *do* look like a brigand!" he said, in an easy tone, that had a curious effect upon the excited boy. "I don't so much wonder that I took you for a footpad!"

No one but Dick Dayton,—for it was the Springtown "Mascot" himself who was trying to make friends with the ranch boy,—could have "hit off" the situation so easily. The "brigand's" face had already relaxed somewhat, though his tongue was not to be so lightly loosed.

"The fact is," Dayton went on, following up his advantage; "The fact is, there was a hold-up here in the pass last week, and my wife and I were just saying what a jolly good place it was for that kind of thing, when you flung yourself at the horses' heads. I don't

know what you would have done under the circumstances, but I know you 'd have been either a fool or a prophet if you had n't let fly for all you were worth ! "

The boy looked up at the friendly, humorous face, and pleasant relentings stole upon him.

" Well, then," he said, with a sudden, flashing smile, which illuminated his harsh countenance, very much as the gold of the aspens lit up the wall of frowning rock over there. " That 's all right, and I 'm glad I did it."

" All right ! " cried Dayton, with a sudden rising emotion in his voice,—" I should think it *was* all right ! It is n't every day that a man and his wife get their lives saved in that off-hand way ! Why ! I 'm all *balled up* every time I think of it ! "

" Oh, well ; I don't know ! " said Waldo, relapsing into embarrassment again ; " I guess it was the horses I thought of as much as anything ! "

Dayton was still too sincerely moved to laugh outright at this unexpected turn, as he would have done in spite of himself under ordinary circumstances, but he found it a relief to slip back into his tone of easy banter.

" If that 's the case," he said ; " would you mind coming back and being introduced to the

horses? They are just behind us, and I think they ought to have a chance to make their acknowledgments."

The boy, very much aware that he had said the wrong thing, yet attracted, in spite of himself and his own blunders, to the good-natured giant, yielded, awkwardly enough, and retraced his steps. They were soon face to face with the horses, making their way at a slow walk down the road, driven by the woman whose face Waldo had had a confused glimpse of in the heat of that fateful encounter.

"This is my wife, Mrs. Dayton," said the big man; "and you are?"

"Waldo Kean."

For the first time in his life the boy had taken his hat off as a matter of ceremony. He had done so in unconscious imitation of Dayton, who had lifted his own as he mentioned his wife's name. Waldo Kean did not perhaps realize that the "education" he was so ambitious of achieving was begun then and there.

The shapeless old hat once off, he did not find it easy to put it on again, and, as Mrs. Dayton leaned forward with extended hand, he stopped to tuck the battered bundle of felt into his pocket before clasping the bit of dainty kid she held out to him.

She was already speaking, and, strangely enough, there was something in her voice which made him think of his mother's as it had sounded just before it broke into that pathetic little sob.

"There is so little good in talking about what a person feels," she was saying; "that I 'm not going to try." Yes, the little break in the voice was something he had heard but once in his life before; yet nothing could have been less like his mother than the expressive young face bending toward him.

The great half-civilized boy took one look at the face, and all his self-consciousness vanished.

"I guess anybody 'd like to do you a good turn!" he declared boldly, as he loosed the small gloved hand from the big clutch he had given it. The charming face flushed as warmly as if it had never been complimented before.

"Are you going to stay in Springtown?" its owner asked.

"I 'm going to the college," the young geologist answered proudly.

"Then you 'd better let us have your pack," said Dayton. "We can do that much for you! There 's lots of room in back here."

Waldo hesitated; he was used to carrying

his own burdens. But Dayton had hold of the pack, and it seemed to find its own way into the buggy.

"There! That will ride nicely," said Dayton. "Now I suppose we may call ourselves quits?" and he glanced quizzically at the boy who had clearly missed the amiable satire of the suggestion.

The two walked on together for some time, keeping close beside the buggy. The horses were perfectly docile now that no one seemed disposed to fly at their heads. Waldo began to feel that he had really been needlessly violent with them in that first encounter. He pulled out his hat and put it on again.

They had come to the narrowest and most stupendous part of the pass, and Waldo, now wonderfully at his ease, had broached the subject of the Notch. He was astonished to find how conversible these new acquaintances were. They proved much easier to talk with than his ranch neighbors whom he had known all his life. And, better still, they knew a surprising lot about minerals and flowers and things of that sort, that were but sticks and stones to his small world at home.

When, at last, these very remarkable and well-informed people drove away, and he

watched their buggy disappearing down the pass, he found himself possessed of a new and inspiring faith in the approachableness of the great world he was about to confront. He had rather expected to deal with it with hammer and pick,—to wrest the gold of experience from the hardest and flintiest bedrock; and all at once he felt as if he had struck a great "placer" with nuggets of the most agreeable description lying about, ready to his hand!

As he reflected upon these things, the pass was opening out into a curious, cup-shaped valley, crowded with huge hotels and diminutive cottages of more or less fantastic architecture, clustering in the valley, climbing the hills, perching on jutting rocks and overhanging terraces. Waldo knew the secret of this startling outcrop of human enterprise. He knew that here, in this populous nook, were hidden springs of mineral waters, bubbling and sparkling up from the caverns of the earth. He found his way to one of the springs, where he took a long, deep draught of the tingling elixir, speculating the while, as to its nature and source. Then on he went, refreshed and exhilarated.

A few miles of dusty highway brought him at last within the borders of classic Springtown,

classic in its significance to him, as the elm-embowered shades of Cambridge or New Haven to the New England boy at home. As he entered upon the broad Western Avenue, the declining sun had nearly touched the great Peak, its long, level rays striking a perfect glory across the boughs of the cottonwood trees shining in the height of their yellow autumn splendor. They arched the walk he trod, and stretched to the northward, a marvellous golden vista, as brilliant as the promise of the future itself. There were fine residences on either side of the avenue, finer than anything the ranch boy had ever dreamed of, while off to the west stretched the line of mountains, transfigured in the warm afternoon light. But all the boy could see or think of was that golden vista, stretching before him to the very portals of the house of learning.

And presently, along this glorified path, a man approached, and as the two came face to face, he stopped before the boy and called him by name.

The whole situation was so wonderful,—so magical it seemed to Waldo in the exaltation of the moment,—that he did not pause to consider how his name should be known to a chance passer-by ; and when the stranger went

on to give his own name, and it was the name of the college president, the boy accepted the fact that dreams come true, and only held his head a little higher and trod the path a little more firmly, as he walked beside the president under the yellow cottonwoods.

"I came out to meet you," the president was saying, in a big, friendly voice. "I heard you were coming, and I thought we might talk things over a bit on the way."

They chatted a little of the boy's plans and resources, of the classes he was to enter, and of what he might accomplish in his college course; and then they came out from under the trees, and found themselves upon the college campus. A game of football was going on there, the figures of the players fairly irradiated in the golden light which fell aslant the great open space, touching the scant yellowish grass into a play of shimmering color. They stood a moment, while the president pointed out to Waldo the different college buildings. Then :—

"I have something pleasant to tell you," his companion remarked, with a glance at the strong eager face of the boy. "The college has just had the gift of a scholarship."

"I 'm glad of that," said Waldo, heartily,

finding a cheerful omen in the fact that the day was an auspicious one for others beside himself.

"The gift is a sort of thank-offering," he heard his new friend say; "from a man who fell in with *you*—up in the pass this afternoon!"

The boy's face went crimson at the words, but he only fixed his eyes the more intently upon the football players, as if his destiny had depended upon the outcome of the game.

"The scholarship is the largest we have;"—he heard the words distinctly, but they struck him as coming from quite a long distance. "It is to be called—*the Waldo Kean Scholarship!*"

The Waldo Kean Scholarship! How well that sounded! What a good, convincing ring it had, as if it had been intended from the very beginning of things!

He stood silent a moment, pondering it, while the president waited for him to speak; and as he watched the field the football players seemed to mingle and vanish from sight like shadows in a dream, while in their place a certain tall angular form stood out, loose-jointed, somewhat bent, yet full of character and power. All the splendor of the setting sun centred upon that rugged vision, that yet did not bate one jot of its homely reality.

And the boy, lifting his head with a proud gesture, and with a straightening of the whole figure, looked the president in the face and said : " *That is my father's name !* "

They started to cross the campus, where the football players were once more in possession. The sun had dropped behind the Peak, and the glory was fading from the face of the earth ; but to Waldo Kean, walking side by side with the college president, the world was alight with the rays of a sun whose setting was yet a long way off ; and the golden vista he beheld before him was nothing less than the splendid illimitable future,—the future of the New West, which was to be his by right of conquest !

THE END.

DATE DUE

NOV 13 1972

GAYLORD

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

240410

PZ3
.F953p5